

In Unity ^{AND} THE GAY CHRISTIAN

NEWS AND OPINION JOURNAL

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GO, THEREFORE, AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS . . .



An Elder's Message

"God Was In Christ"

by The Rev. Nancy Wilson

Our church is not only revolutionary, it is radical. Radical in the literal meaning of the word, "getting back to the roots". No church can really continue to grow unless it is properly rooted. Rotten roots, rotten church. Jesus said that when he talked about being connected to the vine (John 15).

The church of Jesus Christ has radical roots. The root I want to talk about is the primary root. The meaning of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Theologians call it "Christology". I am talking about Jesus' relationship to God and what that has to do with us. Jesus asked "Who do you say I am?" How we answer that, in our words and with our lives, makes all the difference.

But, you say, doesn't every Christian know who Jesus is? He's the Son of God, Savior, and Lord, you say. Yes. But what does all that really mean? Paul said, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to God", (II Cor 5:18 - 19). That's the root, the radical root.

So what's the problem? As I have listened to people, I have discovered that even many Christians do not really understand the radicalness, the scandalousness, of that root. I have identified at least two "perversions" of Christology that have been preached and taught through thousands of years of Christian history. Most "perversions" or "heresies" are not *totally* false, but are usually exaggerations of a partial truth. Sometimes they are very subtle. I would like to "un-subtle" them in order to get at why I think they are perverse.

The first version sounds something like this: Jesus is the intermediary between God and us (sounds OK, so far). God sent Jesus, God's Son, into the world. Human beings were so horrible, and God was so angry, that God's anger could not be appeased. The only solution was for Jesus to die to pay for our sins. Since Jesus was a perfect man, his sacrifice was acceptable to God. Jesus was then raised and became seated at God's right hand. To some of you, this still sounds OK, so far.

The Rev. Ken Martin told me a story about when he was a child in Mississippi. He went to church, and there on the altar was a sweet little lamb. The children came up, and were encouraged to play with the lamb, and were then sent out of the room. When they returned, the lamb had been slaughtered and strung up on a cross. The preacher said "See, little children, this is what God did to Jesus to save you." Ken said, "I ended up loving Jesus, but hating God. The end result of this theology said to me that 'God killed Jesus to save me!'"

What's wrong with this? Two things. Firstly, Jesus becomes a demi-god — a softer, gentler, kinder god. Sort

of like God's alter-ego. We can pray to Jesus to get to God. I had one student who said "I have always felt a close, warm relationship with Jesus. But God scares me, still. God feels distant and too unapproachable. So I pray only to Jesus." Jesus and God thus become separated, and the worst thing is that God is seen as the blood-thirsty, unmerciful "angry old man in the sky". This God, the patriarchal fascist, is a violation of Paul's magnificent words to us that "God was in Christ". Jesus becomes a God — substitute, and God can be ignored in a unitarianism of the second person of the Trinity.

The other "perversion" is more common, perhaps, and more congenial. That is the version that Jesus was a wonderful human who transcended sin, and is our example and friend. Sounds fine, so far. Jesus was the prophet-teacher-healer who was the first Christian, who was totally obedient to God, no more, no less. This view stresses the complete humanity of Jesus. Now, I believe in Jesus' complete humanity. But often this view of Jesus ignores the unique role of Jesus the Christ in salvation history. It ignores the Incarnation, the unique rela-

JESUS BECOMES A DEMI-GOD —

A SOFTER, GENTLER, KINDER GOD.

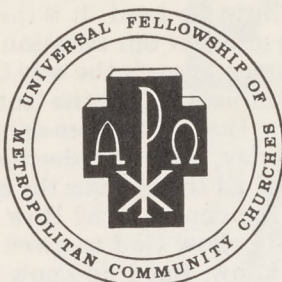
SORT OF LIKE GOD'S ALTER-EGO.

tionship of Jesus to God. It misses the point of Paul's radical statement, "God was in Christ."

So where does that leave us? For centuries, theologians have debated the divinity/humanity of Jesus. When it comes right down to it, this debate misses the point. It concentrates so heavily on the person of Jesus that it excludes the real root issue. That is, the *loving activity of God in Jesus the Christ*. The real question is not "Who is Jesus?" but "What was/is God doing in Jesus the Christ?" Our problem, essentially, is not what to do with Jesus, but how we understand the God who was uniquely present in Jesus. Who is this God? Our answer must not violate the humanity of Jesus nor the oneness and sovereignty of the God who was in Christ.

In fear and trembling, I offer another way, besides the divinity/humanity of Jesus debate, to understand all

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In Unity

IN UNITY

LIAISON ELDER
The Rev. Troy D. Perry

EDITOR
Donna J. Wade

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS
Rick Noll
Gary Turner
Roger Webb

GRAPHICS
Robin Weber

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

EDITOR
The Rev. F. Jay Deacon

ABOUT THE COVER: The cover of this issue of *In Unity* is a listing of all the MCC congregations, printed over a reproduction of the original ad placed in the *Advocate* by the Rev. Perry. This ad announced the first worship service of Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles, and is reprinted in commemoration of that Church's tenth anniversary.

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Address all correspondence to:

UFMCC, IN UNITY
5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304
Los Angeles, CA 90029

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this. This way is not new. It is the root of all unperverted Christian theology, but has often been overshadowed.

Part of the radicalness of the gospel is that God experienced humanness in Jesus the Christ. Salvation history is the history of God's unending efforts to reach human beings and to be reconciled with us. I believe that God lived a human life in Jesus. For St. Paul, the crucial issue was the cross. We often say that on the cross, Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world. One way to understand "sin" is "separation from God, others, and self". To be thus separated, is hell itself.

The agony of the cross was not *only* the physical pain and humiliation, but the fact that Jesus was separated from others by a betrayal, and for a moment, at least, from God. Jesus experienced a feeling of abandonment by God on the cross ("My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"). If it is true, as Paul says, that God was in Christ, then God experienced on the cross, in the person of Jesus, the condition of human sin — alienation from self, others, and God. God experienced, in Jesus, betrayal by others, and for a moment, a divine schizophrenia, a being broken apart, physically and spiritually. God experienced the hell of human sin, and God did that out of infinite love for us, and in order to be finally reconciled with us.

Thus, it is God who taught, healed, wept, laughed, suffered, died, and rose again for us in Jesus the Christ. God is not the blood-thirsty tyrant who demanded Jesus' blood. Rather, it is God him/herself who bled for us in Jesus! God loved us so much that God gave him/herself to us totally, and became vulnerable to us by becoming one of us, and *that* is scandalous.

The miracle of it all also lies in the resurrection. Even though we rejected God in the person of Jesus, even though we did our worst (we are the blood-thirsty ones, after all), God's love did not give up, did not quit, lay down, and die forever. The God who IS love rose up from the grave, in Jesus the Christ, triumphant over all our sins, despite our attempts to destroy that love.

To say "Jesus is Lord" is to say that the God who is love, and who was in Christ, is Lord. It is the God of and in Jesus who paid the price for our salvation. That is the essence of unearned grace. Jesus is the way God gets to us! Jesus is the one God uses so that the truth might happen in you and me. The Christ, pre-existent, in Jesus, and in the church today, is God's redeeming self.

Part of the wonder of all this is Jesus the man, the human being. Why did God choose him? How could a human being so completely allow God to dwell in him? Quite honestly, I do not know. But I do know that the radicalness of the gospel goes one step further. We, as the church, are called to be the Body of Christ in the world. While God's presence in Jesus was unique, WE are commanded to continue that unique incarnation in ourselves. We must invite God to dwell in us, as God did in Jesus. We must "Practice the presence of God" in our individual and corporate lives. We are called to assist God in reconciling the world (as Paul said "to be agents of reconciliation" II Cor. 18 and 19). What an awesome responsibility!

But God has promised us grace sufficient for our every need, and we can claim that promise! The whole agonizing history of the struggle of the Christian Church can be summed up in our attempts and failures to allow God to dwell in us as Christ's Body in the world. The brutalities, failures, fragmentations, and sins of Christians and the Church are the story of God's continuing crucifixion in our midst; the break-throughs, the loving ministry of word and sacrament, and redeeming activities through Christians and the Church is God's continuing resurrection in our midst.

MCC is radical and revolutionary as we claim that, Yes! Hallelujah! God *can* dwell in a gay body, as well as in a straight body; a black body as in a white body; a female body as in a male body; an old or young body, or a handicapped body; an Indian, European, Asian or American body. *Anybody and everybody can become the Temple of the Holy Spirit, a part of the Body of Christ.*

And that's radical and scandalous.

†

PLAYBOY MAGAZINE AD BRINGS FLOOD OF RESPONSES

The following ad appeared in the Forum Section of Playboy magazine regarding the Board of Institutional Ministry (USA) project, *The Prisoner's Yellow Pages*, which is the only directory of its kind in existence:

THE PRISONER'S YELLOW PAGES: *For those on the inside looking out, or getting out with no place to go, here's a 37-page state-by-state directory of agencies, organizations, halfway houses, law libraries and legal-aid groups offering assistance to both cons and ex-cons who need a helping hand. The Playboy Foundation provided the initial printing and these copies are free to prisoners while the supply lasts. Others should enclose a donation to help keep the project going.*

Response to this ad has been tremendous (1000 in the last month), and requests are currently coming in at the rate of 150-200 per week. The Playboy Foundation donated only a limited supply of the *Yellow Pages*, which is rapidly dwindling. We are grateful that we can be of help to so many who are inmates, but to be honest, we didn't expect so many requests. We share the need with you so that together we can keep a continued supply of *Yellow Pages* going into the prisons. To those of us on the 'outside', the cost is \$3.95 per copy, while we supply free copies to inmates. You can help us continue this supply by sponsoring free prisoners' copies at \$1.00 each.

RETRACTION

The August — September issue of IN UNITY erroneously reported that the Rev.'s Lawrence Gauer and Robert Wolfe were the Co-pastors of MCC Toronto. They are the Co-pastors of MCC Vancouver. The Rev. Brent Hawkes is the Pastor of MCC Toronto.

We sincerely apologize for any confusion or inconvenience this has caused for either congregation.

The Editor

YES, I will sponsor _____ inmates at \$1.00 per copy.

Enclosed is my donation in the amount of _____.

Send contributions to:

UFMCC Board of Institutional Ministry (USA)
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Ecclesiastes: Another View

by The Rev. Nancy Lila Radclyffe

The book of Ecclesiastes is summed up in Chapter 3 and this article looks at the book through a closer look at this chapter. This was written prior to the publication of Rev. Pulling's article, and does not disagree with that article, but it does say some different things. The popular song, "Turn, Turn, Turn" comes from this chapter, and you may find it helpful to listen to it as well as reading Chapters 1 and 3.

This chapter has been going through my head since we studied it in the Old Testament last April. The book has not only intrigued me since then, but I have found comfort, understanding, and reassurance from it. This may seem strange that a book, the study of which has led to nervous breakdowns and suicides, which sounds so pessimistic, can offer this to someone. After all, isn't it saying, "what's the use?" There is wickedness in the place of justice, the godly still toil and die despite their piety. Why try?

It is a comfort to me because it is realistic. It is scripture that tells it like it is. This must mean that God understands what it is like for us humans. There is evil and good in this world and because of that, evil will sometimes prevail, regardless, and good will sometimes prevail, regardless. We as humans have not been given the wisdom, knowledge or insight to know the rhyme or reason in this or what God's purpose is. It is stated that we do not know and are not supposed to know.

What does this mean for us? It would seem to mean that we are not to forever berate ourselves when we hate, kill, break down, etc. Because there is evil, those things will happen and we will be the perpetrators and the receivers of them. We are not to bog ourselves down with remorse, or decide it is no use to go on because no matter what we do, evil still occurs, people hate us and do not understand, war happens again.

No, we are to go on, we are to enjoy our work. We are to continue to live. We are not to resort to suicide, self-pity, withdrawal from the world. "I know that there is nothing better for us than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we live; also that it is God's gift to humans that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in our toil." (3:12-13). It is a gift and we are rejecting that gift when we give up, when we say there cannot be a God with so much evil in the world. We are to be happy and enjoy ourselves and our work.

Just who do we think we are when we try to out-guess God? When we think we should be able to know or understand all of God's reasons and ways. If we knew

that, we would be gods. We are mere human beings. We are not supposed to have all of the answers, we don't have to have all the answers. Isn't that a relief?

We don't have to do everything right. We don't have to be responsible for everything. We just have to continue to live, enjoy ourselves and continue the work God has given us to do. If we get mad at someone and then later regret it, we can then have a time to love. If we are crying today, it is not the end of the world, for our day to laugh will come. If we have to give up someone or something we love, we will also find a time when we will get to keep or have someone or something we love, it may not be the same someone or something, but our day will come. The opposite is also true.

Have we been treated unjustly when we should have been treated justly? Our day for justice will come. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. . . ." (3:1). According to this passage there are no exceptions, there is a time for absolutely everything! There's a time to hate gays and, there will be a time to love gays. Taking this a step further, Chapter 1 says, "there is nothing new under the sun." (1:9) It would follow then, that we will find or are finding, that even loving homosexuals is not new. Chapter 3 states this concept in another way, "That which is, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away." (3:15). It will all come to pass . . . we have been driven away, God is seeking us.

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If not already apparent, I find Ecclesiastes to be ultimately optimistic, but not primarily for the reasons already cited. This writer is the ultimate optimist because of the main over-riding message of this book. We are to do the right thing, the just thing, the good thing, because it is right, just, and good — not because of a reward we expect to get for it, or because we have had it rotten. Can you imagine what a super world this would be if everyone did this rather than being concerned about "what's in it for me?" Or rather than "I was treated unjustly, so I'll treat them unjustly."

The Book of Job reflects this same type of philosophy, we are to love God for God's sake, not for what God does for us. If we do this, everything else will fall into place. It may not work out just as we would have it, but it will work out. This is the message of Ecclesiastes and the faith of Job.

†

The Cults: Challenging MCC's Ecumenism

by The Rev. Robert Waldrop

AUTHOR'S NOTE: In this article, the word "cult" will be used to refer to churches considered to be unorthodox expressions of the Christian faith. This would include churches such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, and others. I will refer only to groups which have come out of the Christian tradition, having no experience with the various non-Christian groups represented in the world today. The term cult is used for convenience only, and is not meant in any derogatory or disrespectful way.

Most of the examples are drawn from my experience as a former elder and missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon). I presently pastor MCC Salt Lake City, the home of the Mormon Church. Most of my experiences are with former members of this group; however, many of the cults have certain characteristics in common, and the principles would remain the same.

When describing our church, MCC members often use the term "ecumenical". We explain with pride that we have bound low church Pentecostals and high church Anglicans together in a bond of love and service. This is fine as long as we are talking about Catholics and Episcopalians, Baptists and Methodists — all churches which are considered "orthodox".

What happens, though, when one of the Jehovah's Witnesses' "Anointed Class" offers him/herself for membership? How strictly do we interpret the Fellowship Statement of Faith when a member of the Mormon Church, who believes that God is a physical man and that "as man (sic) is, God once was, as God is, man (sic) may become", wishes to join our Fellowship?

Some deal with these situations by assuming that such a person is not a Christian, and needs to be "converted", which, coming from a gay Christian in an "ecumenical" church, sounds a bit hollow. Others simply avoid the issue. In Salt Lake City, we deal with these issues on a daily basis. As the cults grow in membership, and as the UFMCC also grows, ministers and laity will meet these questions more and more.

In dealing with their gayness, members of the cults often have special needs and/or problems which relate directly to the beliefs and practices of their former affiliations. To be successful in helping such people, these beliefs must be dealt with. To deal with a Christian Scientist as you would a Baptist would be a simple exercise in futility. Treating gay Mormons to a course on what the Bible says about homosexuality, without dealing with what the Prophet has said, is also unsuccessful. If we are unwilling, or unprepared, to face such issues, we can do much harm.

In dealing with former members of the cults, we must first think, study, and pray about what the term 'ecumenical' really means. We use the term so often that I wonder if we really realize what it means in all of its implications. The question becomes more acute as we develop more of our own unique traditions and practices.

As a former member of a cult, I would like to offer a few guidelines to the ministers and laity of the UFMCC in how to deal with former members of such groups, with regard to their relationships with MCC.

A working knowledge of the major cults of the area in which you live and minister is recommended. In cultivating this knowledge, as a general rule avoid the expository books such as *Mormonism Unveiled* or *Kingdom of the Cults*. Based on my personal experience in the LDS Church, the information concerning that church in such works is usually highly biased and inaccurate. This causes me to doubt the accuracy of information concerning other groups. The best way to understand a group is to read and study what they say about themselves — talk to their representatives, or speak with someone who has already worked through the issues themselves. For example, those seeking an understanding of the LDS Church should study the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*, all of which are accepted by the LDS Church as Scripture.

Forget the misconceptions and stereotypes you may have about these groups. If you have no personal knowledge concerning a particular group, and are counselling a member of that group, let her/him tell you about it. A lot of misconceptions have, by constant repetition, become accepted gospel concerning the cults. Using such

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What happens, though, when one of the Jehovah's Witnesses' "Anointed Class" offers him/herself for membership? How strictly do we interpret the Fellowship Statement of Faith when a member of the Mormon Church, who believes that God is a physical man and that "as man (sic) is, God once was, as God is, man (sic) may become", wishes to join our Fellowship?

Some deal with these situations by assuming that such a person is not a Christian, and needs to be "converted", which, coming from a gay Christian in an "ecumenical" church, sounds a bit hollow. Others simply avoid the issue. In Salt Lake City, we deal with these issues on a daily basis. As the cults grow in membership, and as the UFMCC also grows, ministers and laity will meet these questions more and more.

In dealing with their gayness, members of the cults often have special needs and/or problems which relate directly to the beliefs and practices of their former affiliations. To be successful in helping such people, these beliefs must be dealt with. To deal with a Christian Scientist as you would a Baptist would be a simple exercise in futility. Treating gay Mormons to a course on what the Bible says about homosexuality, without dealing with what the Prophet has said, is also unsuccessful. If we are unwilling, or unprepared, to face such issues, we can do much harm.

In dealing with former members of the cults, we must first think, study, and pray about what the term 'ecumenical' really means. We use the term so often that I wonder if we really realize what it means in all of its implications. The question becomes more acute as we develop more of our own unique traditions and practices.

As a former member of a cult, I would like to offer a few guidelines to the ministers and laity of the UFMCC in how to deal with former members of such groups, with regard to their relationships with MCC.

A working knowledge of the major cults of the area in which you live and minister is recommended. In cultivating this knowledge, as a general rule avoid the expository books such as *Mormonism Unveiled* or *Kingdom of the Cults*. Based on my personal experience in the LDS Church, the information concerning that church in such works is usually highly biased and inaccurate. This causes me to doubt the accuracy of information concerning other groups. The best way to understand a group is to read and study what they say about themselves — talk to their representatives, or speak with someone who has already worked through the issues themselves. For example, those seeking an understanding of the LDS Church should study the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*, all of which are accepted by the LDS Church as Scripture.

Forget the misconceptions and stereotypes you may have about these groups. If you have no personal knowledge concerning a particular group, and are counselling a member of that group, let her/him tell you about it. A lot of misconceptions have, by constant repetition, become accepted gospel concerning the cults. Using such

information will only alienate the person or persons involved.

Do not become defensive. Members of cults often have a different view of orthodox Christian teaching. Be prepared to discuss, rationally and lovingly, the reasoning behind the teaching in question. Remember that the Bible is not a collection of "proof texts" to be used against someone, but are to be shared with another person. In any case, appeals to the Bible are often less than successful, for almost every cult has an additional source of authority on which their beliefs are based. Whether that authority is another book of scripture, a Prophet, or an interpretive magazine, the real issue is often what *that* source has said, rather than what the Bible says.

While not compromising one's own conscience, we should all remember that some of the questions raised by members of the cults are questions the Church has debated for 2000 years and remain unanswered. A study of Christian history shows plainly that yesterday's heresy can become today's orthodox teaching.

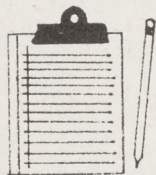
Understand that discussing or approaching difficult questions (such as sexism) with former members of the cults often requires new approaches, which take a lot of thought, study, and prayer to work out. For example, in discussing the use of personal pronouns or the term "Father" in relation to God with a former Mormon, one has to deal with the prevalent LDS teaching that God is a physical man, who has a wife — who is literally our Heavenly Mother. Somehow, the traditional approaches to sharing the inclusive nature of God are not overly effective in such a situation.

Lastly, we must remember that our common meeting ground with all Christians is our faith and belief in Jesus Christ. I believe that the ecumenical nature of the UFMCC has room for both ex-Mormons and ex-Baptists, former Jehovah's Witnesses and former Roman Catholics. For in discovering our common heritage as members of the Body of Christ, our diversity makes us stronger, healthier, and more united. †

News Composite

EDITOR'S NOTE: In this new column, Patrick Townson will be presenting short interviews and information of interest to our community. Coverage will include the happenings in the political, social, and religious arenas. Mr. Townson encourages our readers to submit brief summaries and/or clippings, etc. of matters pertinent to our community. This column, edited by Mr. Townson, will take the place of our regular "Newsnotes" column.

Please send any clippings to Mr. Townson at POB 1003, Chicago, IL, 60690.



BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION: Some of you around the Fellowship may have heard of me. For about four years, from 1973 through late 1977, I operated a telephone recorded message with daily gay news announcements for the Chicago community. I helped form *Chicago Gay Life*, which has become the leading gay newspaper in the Midwest, and one of the best in the nation. After a year out of circulation, living quietly out of the mainstream, and managing my business, it is surprising how out of touch one can become! I was chairperson of Gay Pride Week here in Chicago in '75, and assistant chairperson in '74. We thought our parades and events were great — but this year they were bigger and better than ever, all over the country, with many hundreds of new men and women moving into the ranks to fill the jobs left behind

by those of us who took our "sabbaticals".

MAYBE THE BIGGEST NEWS STORY THIS YEAR has been the in-fighting among the "established" churches over the issues of gay ordination, salvation for gays, and a host of other gay related issues. Every church convention in the past two years, it seems, has voted pro or con on resolutions about us. Try and name for me a religious publication somewhere that has not done a special gay issue in recent months. I get about twenty religious periodicals a month, and they have all devoted issues to gays. Needless to say, the "Letters" feature of each magazine has received an extremely heavy volume of mail following publication. No need to worry about the biblical injunction against "those who are luke-warm . . ." on the Christian homosexual issue. Either the response has been extremely nice, or extremely nasty, but seldom just in-between. And we haven't heard the end of the subject yet, I am sure. As sad as it makes all of us to think of Christ's seamless garment being ripped in shreds, I think at least a couple of the mainline denominations will keep the rumbling going until a complete schism occurs over folks like you and me, and our right to worship Who we believe is our God, too, as the book is so aptly titled. . . .

ON THE HOME FRONT, Chicago's *Gay Horizons*, a social service organization for our local community, and foster parent of many offspring organizations, including the Howard Brown Clinic (for VD testing) and a peer-counseling organization finally got its IRS 503-C-3 exemption. Although many other organizations have convinced the IRS of their tax exempt requirements, this is the first time

a Chicago group has achieved that status, to the best of my knowledge. I think everyone familiar with the organization will agree that if anyone deserved the government break, they did. Their Chicago phone number states what they are there for, (312) 929-HELP, from 7 PM daily.

MAYBE YOU SAW THE ADVOCATE report of the recent Johnny Carson show when a comic made the remark, "I love California, but I'm a little concerned about the schools. All the teachers are heterosexuals, and my son is gay . . ." Which reminds me to ask you all (not just Californians), what are you doing to help defeat Mr. Briggs and his Initiative? Don't just rest on your laurels of past accomplishments. Yes, MCC has come a long way, a lot of past discrimination is gone, the entire gay lib movement has grown by leaps and bounds, the gay press has become terrific — from the original *Advocate* four pager in '68, to the healthy voice we have now with our multitude of publications. And after Mr. Briggs is finished, Anita will probably come in to save the rest of us. Don't let it get out of hand. Contact your local organization best equipped to handle legislative concerns for the gay community. We have simply come to far in the past ten years to go back in a closet now.

FOR CLOSERS, THIS TIME, let me have your input for this column. Send clippings from local papers that you want to share with our brothers and sisters. We get the majority of gay papers, but local material can sometimes help a lot. We will acknowledge it, even if we can't use it for one reason or another. Please write directly to me in Chicago.

Patrick Townson

MCC-LA Celebrates Ten Years Of Ministry

EDITOR'S NOTE: Quotes in this article are taken, with permission, from interviews conducted by the Rev. Lucia Chappelle for an award-winning radio program.

Ten years ago in Los Angeles, Troy Perry listened as a friend shared the pain he experienced when his minister told him he could not be a Christian and a homosexual. Through his friend's despair, the Rev. Perry came to realize God's purpose for his life — to establish a church that would minister to those whom "established" churches had rejected. "When Tony left, I said, 'All right, God, I think I've found my niche in the ministry again. If you want to see a church started as an outreach into the gay community, you let me know when.' And then that still, small voice in the mind's ear let me know 'Now.'" This was the beginning of the UFMCC, which now has 112 congregations internationally. And as the UFMCC has grown, so too has the "vision", which no longer only encompasses a ministry to the homophile community, but to anyone who seeks to fully realize their potential to live in union with God.

The Rev. Perry purchased an ad in the *Advocate*, and on October 6, 1968, the first service of Metropolitan Community Church was held in Rev. Perry's home in Huntington Park, CA. There were twelve people in attendance at that first gathering, but the congregation has grown considerably over the years, now numbering well over 400.

As the church grew, new meeting places became a necessity, and MCC-LA has been housed in many different buildings, prior to the purchase of its present home — an old opera house, located at 1050 S. Hill St. in LA. The first property owned by MCC-LA, at 22nd and Union, was destroyed by arson on January 27, 1973. Of those early days, the Rev. Perry commented: "It didn't take us six weeks before we grew out of the living room of my home — it became impossible to keep meeting there, and we've grown ever since."

"My first reaction was 'God, what if we fail?' That really worried me. That was the only problem I had. But then I remembered, 'God, you told me to do this, so if it fails, that's you, not me.' I've never looked back since that day."



The Rev. Troy Perry stands amid the ruins of MCC-LA after the arson.

"The first year we were in existence we had to move five times. We moved out of my home into the Women's Club in Huntington Park. We got to stay there six months until someone called and said, 'Do you know what kind of group you have meeting there? A group of queers!' So we had to move."

"We moved to the Embassy Auditorium and got to stay there one month. They found out who we were and after our month's rent was up, that was it. We went from there to the First Methodist Church; they were gracious, and as a stop-gap measure, let us meet there for two weeks, until we could find another place."

"Then we moved to the Encore Theatre, where we stayed for a year and three months, free of charge. The owner said, 'Just save your money and put it in the bank.'"

"We bought the property at 22nd and Union. We got to stay there about a year and a half, and then someone arsoned our building. It burned to the ground January 27, 1973."

The arson was probably MCC-LA's initial collective experience with tragedy. It can also be seen as their first great test of faith. The Rev. Lee Carlton, pastor of the church at the time of the fire, commented on that day: "The Board of Di-



The Rev. Jeri Ann Harvey, the first woman to pastor MCC-LA, is presented to the congregation at her installation on May 14, 1978.

rectors was there while the church was still burning. Within a few minutes there was a large crowd gathered. I looked into the faces of many of these people who had personally sacrificed when the property was purchased — people who had gone into a ranshacked piece of what had once been a beautiful church building, shoveled out pigeon manure, scrubbed floors, painted walls, laid carpeting, and put padding in the pews. Suddenly I felt what they were feeling.

"We decided that we would hold services right out in the street on Sunday, and God gave me the words for that day. I felt I had to share with the people that God did not live at 22nd and Union; that the church did not consist of that building. The church, as I believe Christ would have it, really exists in the hearts of people who love God, and demonstrate it by loving their fellow persons."

A belief that was firmly rooted in the foundations of the church, and which is no less significant today, is that God answers, and works miracles through, prayer. Through the ministry and prayers of MCC-LA, and of all subsequent MCC's, lives have been changed. A brother, Bill B., commented regarding a miracle that occurred in his life through his experience with MCC-LA: "I had terminal cancer, and was confined to a wheelchair. When I first realized that I was going to have to have more surgery, I decided that I would put my total being with God. I realized that it was almost impossible for me to go on, knowing that I had less than two weeks to live. I put all my medication into the bath and flushed it.

"That night we went to church. Halfway through the sermon I began to burn



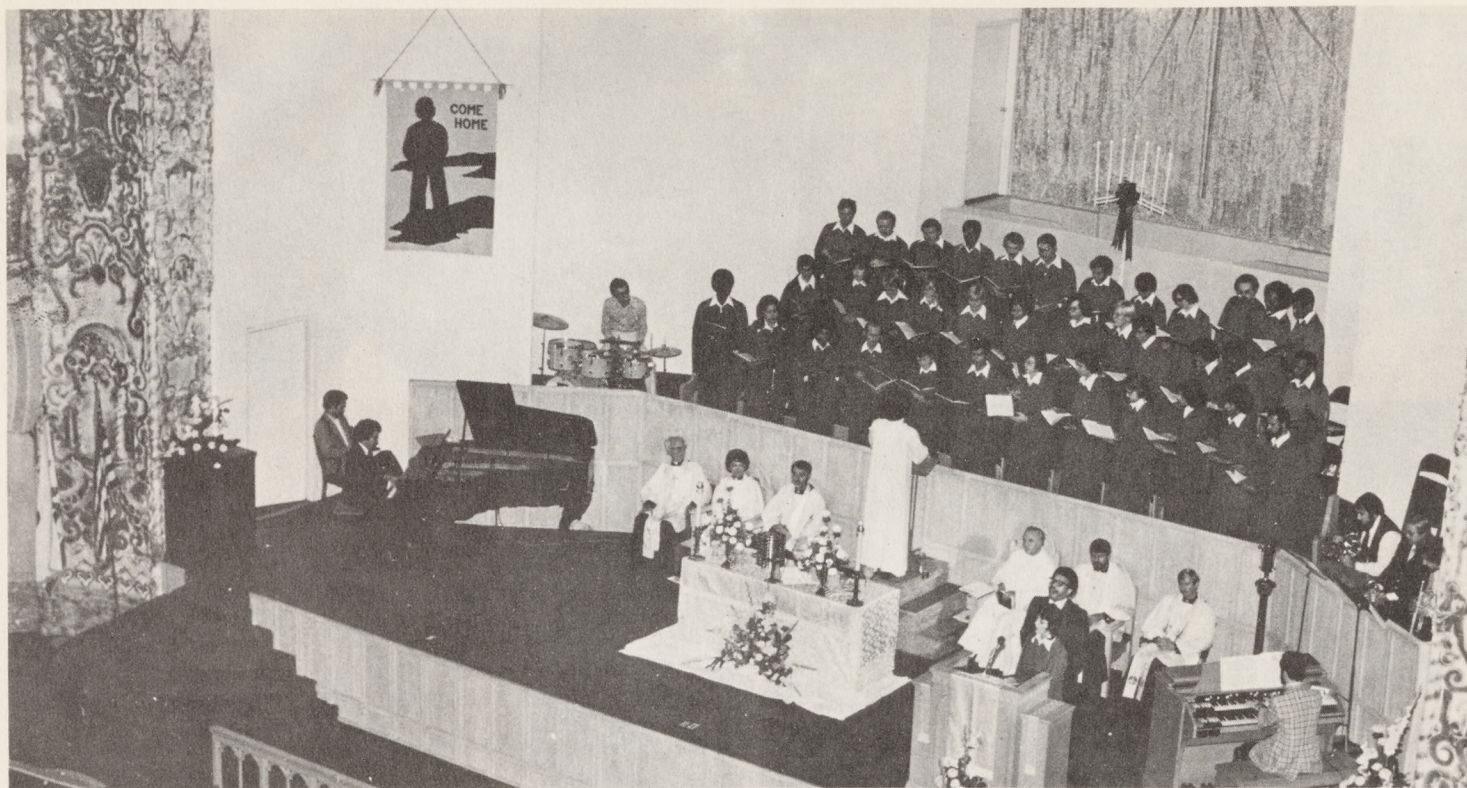
The Rev. Lee Carlton (left) presenting the keys of the church to the Rev. James Sandmire (right) during his installation as pastor.

up. It was like being on fire in the stomach area. I passed out. They took me into the Sommers Room and prayed, waiting for the ambulance to get there to take me to the hospital. On the way, they told Collin that I would not make it to the hospital. After three and a half hours, the doctor came in and asked, 'How do you feel, Bill?' I said, 'I feel wonderful. I don't understand, I've never felt this way in my life.' He said, 'Can you move your arms?' I tried, and my arms moved. He said, 'Can you move your legs?' I tried, and my legs moved. He stood me down

and said, 'Can you stand on your own?' I not only stood on my own, I walked on my own, and praised God. . . .

"As I walked down the corridor to go home, I looked out and there were many people on their knees praying. I thought, 'Oh, I must be dead, so I'd better go back and lay down.' Then I thought, 'No, I'll go ask them what they're doing out there.'

"One of the biggest Deacons in the church, Bill Thorne, was the first one to me, Collin was the second, and the doctor was in-between. He said, 'There's nothing



MCC-LA Choir

we can find wrong with you, Bill.' "

Many MCC ministers received their training from MCC-LA, and have since gone on to pastor churches across the Fellowship. But there has never been a lack of ministerial talent at the church. Previous pastors of the church are the Rev. Elder Troy Perry, the Rev. Lee Carlton, the Rev. Elder Jim Sandmire, and the Rev. Donald Pederson. The clergy currently on staff at the church are the Rev. Willie Smith, the Rev. June Norris, the Rev. Paul Van Hecke, and the Rev. Virgil Hendershot. The current pastor, and the first woman to hold that position, is the Rev. Jeri Ann Harvey.

Despite rumors of dissension regarding the election of a woman as pastor, the congregation, on the whole, has been loving and supportive of her. And, since the Rev. Harvey's election in April of this year, the church has experienced a cohesiveness that had been absent for some time, and has prospered under her leadership.

The Rev. Elder John Hose, at the dedication of the present LA church building, stated that *"this is the church that people referred to as 'that' church, or the 'gay' church in the days when our numbers were small, and the congregations were one — this one. Now they look at this international body and must agree that something wonderful must be going on under this roof, and under all the roofs that house MCC's."*

Something wonderful IS happening, and continues to happen, whenever a body of believers assembles to worship their Creator, experiencing and celebrat-



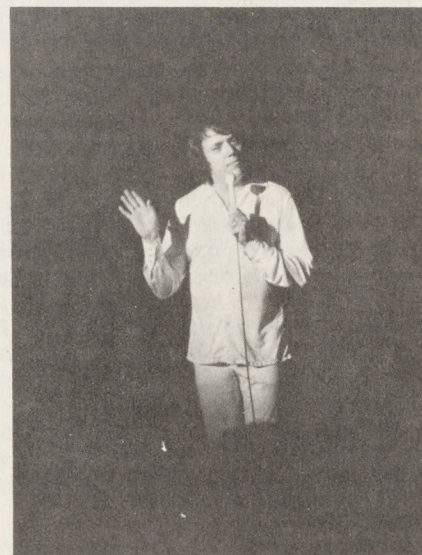
Members of MCC-LA at the going-away party for the Rev. Lee Carlton.

ing God's unconditional love for all persons.

This tenth anniversary is a time for celebration, and a chance to reflect on how far we, as a people, have come. It is a time of rejoicing in our collective heritage, and a time of rededication to our calling. It is a time to be proud of how much we have grown, and to prepare ourselves for the new challenges that await us at each step in that growth.

But it all started at MCC-LA. And the initial outpouring of love that called the church into being is still present, working in the hearts and lives of church members, and of those who have been touched by their ministry.

Congratulations, MCC-LA. For ten years of giving of yourselves to others around you. For instilling a new breath of dignity into the lives you've touched, and injecting a new meaning into the message of Jesus, the Christ. †



The Rev. Willie Smith

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of
theological
reflection
from Metropolitan
Community Church

Toward Authenticity

by The Rev. Valarie Anne Bouchard

Live as free people, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

THIS ARTICLE is the bare skeleton for the formation of Christian ethical response. In reading, remember that it is only the beginning and that it is thematic in design.

Ethics are incomplete without personal journey. In getting in touch with our journeys and in touch with Christ's impact upon us, ethics works in the themes of dying and rising, liberation as opposed to oppression, the necessity for individual sacrifice for the sake of the community, and the absence and presence of God.

As Christians, we have experienced the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Christ as a significant, uplifting event in our lives. Jesus is fully embodied in our midst. We are to be mindful of his ways so that we can be his disciples.

The Rev. Valarie Anne Bouchard has served as the Associate and Interim Pastor of Good Shepherd Parish MCC, Chicago, IL. She received her Master of Divinity degree from McCormick Theological Seminary.

What is the legacy that the son of God left to us? What is the vocation of Jesus that informs our vocation as the people of God? We need to talk about the vocation of Jesus so that we can get some handles on how to be disciples of Christ.

The writer of First Peter tells us that we are to live as free people, yet without using our freedom as a pretext for evil. We are to live as servants of God. Being free is somehow dependent on our living as servants of God. As a community of believers, we are to take on the characteristics of servanthood.

The primary meaning of Jesus' life was that he was the servant of God, closely aligned with God in order to reveal God to us. It was because Jesus was obedient to the will of God that he represented servanthood. Being a servant required that he do God's will over and above the will of worldly rulers. Being a servant necessitated that Jesus also be a sufferer.

Jesus was the Old Testament fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the suffering servant -- the one despised by the world. As the suffering servant, Christ is essential to us.

Read the Second Corinthians passage again. Watch the interplay between suffering and comfort. Listen for God's part in all this. Watch for the number of times comfort is used.

God is right in there with us -- active with us. We share abundantly in Christ's sufferings and in Christ's comfort. He endures the same suffering we do.

It is very important Christian truth that we are going to have to endure suffering and pain along the road of life. The vocation of the servant is to suffer, and because God is intricately involved in the life of

THE
GAY
CHRISTIAN

God's people, it is the vocation of God to suffer along with the servant.

The legacy that Christ left us is that we cannot run away from suffering. It is part of our lives. Some of us endure more than others. Some of it is inexplicable; sometimes unfair. But, we have the promise of comfort.

Suffering is a basic insight of our faith. So is comfort. Christianity says that part of being human is to experience crucifixion in our daily lives. We see the human situation as one that builds in pain; crucifixion as part of what it means to be alive.

I have learned both in my personal life and in counseling that we will never learn to be comforted until we learn to deal with our suffering. We will never be able to comfort until we accept suffering as part of our lives. We cannot avoid it or ignore it. What is important is what we do with it. If we deal with suffering it will not overcome us. If we deal with it, we will grow.

Our lives are similar to what William James describes as a bird in flight. We fly for awhile, land on a perch, then return to our flight. We have various levels of awareness. Sometimes we are caught up in the motion of flying; other times, we descend into the darkness. Some of us are in flight; others are standing still.

Suffering is a process that can be overcome, and in overcoming, makes us stronger. What we have learned

THE CHURCH IS TO RISK SIDING WITH
THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED REGARDLESS
OF COST. WE ARE TO BE DELIVERED FROM
OPPRESSION TO SUFFERING!

in overcoming can be passed on to others. We can use our suffering as a form of service. We become servants so we can comfort others.

We are not to run away from pain; we are to acknowledge it. We are not to accept it passively, but deal with it and overcome it through our identification with Christ's sufferings. Our common purpose on earth should be to understand suffering so that we can try to improve some of the conditions that condemn people to lives of unnecessary pain and sorrow.

Our role is to be that of "wounded healers", a phrase borrowed from Henri Nouwen. Our wounds become the source of our becoming healers because we have had the courage to confront suffering. We cannot offer comfort until we have dealt with suffering.

Comfort is a word that has lost much of its New Testament meaning. When the word "comfort" is used, it does not mean a kind of sedative, almost passive pity. It does not mean sitting and holding someone's hand and saying, "yeah, I understand." The other person may have the distinct impression that no one could possibly understand.

The comfort of God is different. The word "comforter" applied to the Holy Spirit means "strengthen-er". It has the same root as "fortify". We comfort a sufferer when we give that person courage to bear pain and misfortune. Comfort is what sets people back on their feet. The comfort of God says that we can really bear more and handle more than we think we can.

Kahlil Gibran has a marvelous story that helps in an identification with Christ's sufferings. It is a story of Jesus seen through the eyes of the people who knew him. It is the story of Simon and the Cross:

I was on my way to the fields when I saw Him carrying His Cross; and multitudes were following Him. Then I too walked beside Him. His burden stopped Him many a time, for His body was exhausted.

Then a Roman soldier approached me, saying, "Come, you are firm built; carry the cross of this man."

When I heard these words, my heart swelled within me and I was grateful. And I carried His cross.

It was heavy, for it was made of poplar soaked through with the rains of winter. And Jesus looked at me. And the sweat of His forehead was running down upon His beard.

Again He looked at me and He said, "Do you too drink this cup? You shall indeed sip its rim with me to the end of time?"

So saying, He placed His hand upon my free shoulder. And we walked together towards the Hill of the Skull.

But now I felt not the weight of the cross. I felt only His hand. And it was like the wing of a bird upon my shoulder.

Then we reached the hill top, and there they were to crucify Him. And then I felt the weight of the tree. He uttered no word when they drove the nails into His hands and feet, nor made He any sound. And his limbs did not quiver under the hammer.

It seemed as if His hands and feet had died and would only live again when bathed in blood. Yet it seemed also as if He sought the nails as the prince would seek the sceptre; and that He craved to be raised to the heights.

And my heart did not think to pity Him. For I was too filled with wonder. Now the man whose cross I carried has become my cross.

Should they say to me again, "Carry the cross of this man," I would carry it till my road ended in the grave.

But I would beg Him to place His hand upon my shoulder.

This happened many years ago; and still whenever I follow the furrow in the field, and in that drowsy moment before sleep, I think always of that Beloved Man.

And I feel His winged hand, here, on my left shoulder.

Kahlil Gibran *Jesus, Son of Man*

The legacy of Christ is that suffering allows us to be comforters. We can use our suffering to benefit other people. If we truly understand Christ, it is not the suffering we will remember -- it is the joy. "... And I feel His winged hand, here, on my left shoulder. ..."

If one were to read Dorothee Soelle's book *Suffering*¹ it would be very clear that the author underscores the need for Christians to understand their vocation to be that of sufferers. It should be because one claims Christ that one suffers, yet the author reminds us that Christians have sought to conquer or misdirect suffering rather than *faithfully* seek for the meaning of suffering in their lives.

Christianity is a religion that has endeavored to comfort the afflicted by denying the true composition of suffering instead of afflicting the comfortable by virtue of a faith that calls Christians to align with the oppressed, downtrodden, and forgotten of the world. *The keynote to a Christian existence is the church's position on justice in the world.*

Many of us have experienced broken-openness before God. Whether we can claim that experience as an asset or a liability makes all the difference in the world. Claiming suffering is the ticket by which we

enter the human condition, for we are surrounded by oppression and injustice. Again it is important to say that our common purpose on earth should be to understand suffering so that we can try to improve some of the conditions that condemn people to lives of unnecessary pain and sorrow.

The wounds that we bear, both our own and others, come as a result of our faithfulness. The model for our faith is to be found throughout the New Testament. Jesus died for the sins of the many who were not able to follow faithfulness to its logical conclusion — death on the cross. Jesus was persecuted and died at the hands of those who were threatened by a faithfulness that questioned and undermined oppression and injustice wherever it existed.

And what is the mandate of each Christian as it has been given us through Paul? We as individuals are to participate in dying and rising with Christ (Rom 6). We are to die with Christ in order to rise with Christ.

What does faith call us to do? If we accept the role of wounded healer and realize that faithfulness is our calling, then the church's task is prophetic witness. The church is to risk siding with those who are oppressed regardless of cost. *We are to be delivered from oppression to suffering!*

Where do we look for God? In the places we would least like to find God. It is clear where the church needs to be. The church needs to be with the oppressed. We need to put some hard questions to ourselves. Do we as individuals have the courage to take personal risks in order to gain God's favor . . . not the world's favor?

Is the church with the oppressed, or has the church made an unholy alliance with affluence at the risk of directly or indirectly contributing to oppression?

For Dorothee Soelle, the cross is the ultimate symbol of reality. The cross is the symbol that blocks all efforts at liberation. There is no self-righteousness or glory in suffering itself, but there is glory in suffering because one sides with the oppressed — not the oppressor. Ultimate glory is the resurrection event, and the hope of the life of a Christian is the possibility of resurrection in daily events.

As Dorothee Soelle puts it, "Christianity is the morality of slaves who deny and destroy the values of masters."²

Faithfulness is the key to unlock the tension between those values of the world and those values of God that happen to be in conflict with each other. God's ways are not our ways, and our ways are not God's ways, but faithfulness is to be attentive to God's will.

How do we accomplish faithfulness? We recognize that the resurrection is only possible through the power of love . . . God's love for God's people and our love for God.

Love through the power of the Spirit allows us to risk confrontation. We are to take the risk that, in deciding to confront, it may be our experience that what love can do to hatred is greater than what hatred can do to love.

We have received a radical mandate. We are to give allegiance to one master and we are to serve others without conditions — for the love of the Gospel

is unconditional. In that way, we become ambassadors for Christ, through the power of the Spirit for the greater honor and glory of God.

To be human means that we have the capacity to communicate ourselves — not just something outside ourselves. Speech is what enables us to communicate ourselves. Individuals speak, come together to form larger communities and participate in a symbolic reality structure termed "language." Language allows

*IF WE TRULY UNDERSTAND CHRIST, IT IS
NOT THE SUFFERING WE WILL REMEMBER—
IT IS THE JOY*

the individual to transcend self in order to talk of a panorama of things.

The ability to communicate makes us autonomous and responsible. In a very vital way, we bear the responsibility for our autonomy. Autonomy and responsibility have something to do with our being human.

Jurgen Habermas, in his book *Knowledge and Human Interests*, would tell us that our search for the meaning of autonomy and responsibility in our lives can be derived logically from language.³

Language is marked by the capacity for symbolic communication. One of Habermas' main theses is that interest through knowledge is language. Language is the link between our interests (that which lies between people and binds them together) and knowledge.

Our knowing is dependent on the language that we use. Knowledge is expressed symbolically. Therefore, our ability to know is based on the symbol systems that we have internalized and come to utilize.

Anthropology, especially psychology, gives us the impetus to say that people are dependent upon love, even if the hints of these needs can be relativized by cultural anthropology. It cannot be established by scientific method why human manipulation or cynical hatred should be better than love.

How can we even begin to talk about why we should bother with anyone else? What does it mean to be an individual in community? When are we establishing ourselves at the expense of others rather than contributing by virtue of our own merits and gifts? How does the individual contribute to the whole? When does individualism become a distortion?

Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, tells a story that addresses these themes. It goes like this:

Once upon a time, there was a peasant woman and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deeds of hers he could remember to tell God. "She once pulled up an onion in her garden," said he, "and gave it to a beggar woman." And God answered: "You take the onion then, hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her come to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, then the woman must stay where she is."

The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her. "Come," said he, "catch hold and I'll pull you out." He had

Spirit — can enter our lives. The Spirit of truth says Christ will take the things that are mine and declare them to you, pressing them home upon you, enabling you to grasp and appropriate them, leading you into all truth.

We not only imitate some of Jesus' teachings by imagining what Jesus might have said or how he might

WE HAVE RECEIVED A RADICAL
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have responded; we become Christ's disciples by actually internalizing Christ's message into our lives.

When I say Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior, I in some way bear Christ within me so I can proclaim Christ with my life. I believe that there are two learnings for us when Jesus utters that most significant phrase: "It is to your advantage that I go away."

The first is this image of living out the Good News fully by understanding ourselves as disciples. This is the dimension of Christian vocation.

The primary task and primary mission of the Christian is to call forth the gifts of others. We are not sent into the world in order to make people good. We are not sent to encourage them to do their duty. Ours should be a more wholistic approach.

We know that in some cases, the reason people have resisted the Gospel is that we have gone out to make people good, to help them do their duty, to impose new burdens on them, rather than calling forth the gift which is the essence of the person.

We are to let others know that God is for them and that they can "be". As Paul says over and over again, we are to build up the community of God's people. We exist to help people know that in their deepest hearts, people can be what they were intended to be and can do what they were meant to do.

As Christians, we are heralds of these good tidings. We live the Good News with our lives. How? By exercising our own gifts. By being the best kind of people we can be, we will inspire others to be like us.

A person who is having a good time doing what she/he is doing has a way of calling forth the depths of another. Such a person is Good News. That person is not saying the Good News — that person is the Good News. Jesus, by going, challenges us to move from imitation to discipleship.

Then there is the second dimension of going away that speaks to our personal struggles in understanding God. This dimension could be called the absence and presence of God.

I often have the privilege, in counseling, of listening as people recount their personal journeys to me.

Many have related a similar story that goes something like this: "I've spent the last three years working on my prayer life. For the first couple of years, everything was going well. As I prayed, I felt as though I was growing closer and closer to God. I felt good. These last few months, I haven't felt as close. I must be doing something wrong because I feel like I'm very distant from God."

A very basic learning for us is represented in this story: God is not dependent upon our feelings about whether or not God is there. God is always there.

Whether or not we understand God is another thing. There are times when it is necessary for God to be absent from us so that we can reach inside to find the resources to meet God. When we have the feeling that God is absent, it is a time we should reach for new understandings.

Always, when I sense being lost, I know I am engaged in a creative time — a time that God is going to speak to me in a way I have not seen heard or experienced yet. We cannot manipulate God by believing that God is only there when we think so.

And then there are the things that Jesus leaves with us. He states:

Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail, she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day, you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of God, God will give it to you in my name. Hitherto, you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

John 16:20-24

Here is our taste of the promise of Christ to us. Just as the woman in labor is in anguish and then forgets her agony when the child is born, so there is a season of sorrow that is turned into joy.

Why is there joy? There are two reasons: The first revolves around the phrase, "In that day, you will ask nothing of me."

In examination of the text and viewpoints of translators, that phrase means, "In that day, you will

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WITH EQUAL SHARE.

ask no more questions because everything will be revealed to you."

That is a tremendous comfort to me now. I am a person who operates by asking a lot of questions. It is a great relief to me to have the promise that in the end day, everything will be made known to me.

The second joy is one of practical help to us this very day. There is that little phrase that is sort of a cliché among Christians: "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Remember all the discussion of Jesus' need to go away. "When I have gone and returned," says Jesus, "you will understand me in a new way. Believe that if you ask you will receive."

Roger Hazleton has an inspirational quote that speaks to this issue of asking and receiving. He notes:

just pulled her right out, when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn out, began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and she began kicking them. "I'm to be pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours." As soon as she said that, the onion broke, and the woman fell into the lake, and she is burning there to this day. So the angel wept and went away.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

This woman possesses the disease that characterizes our society — individualism apart from a communal consciousness. She possesses an anxiety that destroys life. She lives without relation to other persons. *Having*, for her, is the most important aspect of life. Even when she is offered a chance to redeem herself, she does not alter her view of life at all; she must have the onion at the expense of others; she is afraid of others and must secure her own survival at all costs. She must save herself by beating down others.

One of the things Dostoevsky is up to is an ontology of good and evil — the dichotomy between that which draws together, ties, integrates the individual in her/himself and with his/her group, and that which disintegrates and tears apart.

Reality composes both these elements, so the author tells us. Sin could very easily be the separation of various parts of self, to be fragmented and not to be as fully whole as it is possible for any human to be. Sin is to be scattered.

On a societal level, everything that we grab hold of and cling to means death. Life destroys itself whenever it is based on having, on privileges over against against those who have nothing. Because we grab hold of it, it perishes.

As long as life continues to be grounded and secured in the privilege of having, it destroys itself. Life is only life when everyone belongs to it with equal right and with equal share.

The imagery of the story suggests that the more others hang onto the old woman, the more unbreakable the onion becomes. If grabbing hold at the expense of others means death, then sharing and communication means life.

The consequence of community is that no one is an island; no one can be saved or forgiven alone, if we take seriously a sense of being born anew. It is difficult to be human when we are preventing others from full participation in life. No one is free until everyone is free.

Action is the cornerstone upon which ethical creation is based. Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition*, can help us to clarify our understandings of action. She defined action as the ability to take initiative, to begin, to set something into motion. Actions never achieve their purpose. Rather, actions contribute to the production of stories that characterize personal histories.

With the compilation of personal histories comes the analysis of social and philosophical history. The model for action is the Greek *polis* where *courage* consisted of the ability to express one's self in public.

Courage is the ability to insert one's self into the world in interaction with others that requires the ability to communicate and make decisions. Action is not possible in isolation.

In the continuation of Arendt's thought, the ongoing nature of action is that it forces open all limita-

tions and cuts across all boundaries (boundlessness), and that it is not possible to know the consequences of one's actions (unpredictability). Courage is the ability to accept the consequences of action with the knowledge that it is not possible to foresee the results.

What results in community? A space of appearance that is characterized by power. Hannah Arendt's definition of power: "Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal; where words are not used to veil intentions, but to disclose realities, deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities."⁴

IS THE CHURCH WITH THE OPPRESSED, OR HAS THE CHURCH MADE AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE WITH AFFLUENCE AT THE RISK OF DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY CONTRI- BUTING TO OPPRESSION?

Whoever chooses not to participate in action is rendered powerless. Power is the component operative in the public realm and is the quality that defines the space of appearance. Power is the lifeblood of a society. Language not only defines us by indicating our interests, but we who have the courage to act have a responsibility toward consistency in word and deed. Language also symbolizes who we are in the sense that authenticity is the result of the proper use of power.

At the end of a course on the "Cultural Revolution and the Church", a group of students at the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago prepared this statement:

Standing before the mystery, a person discovers that each of us has but one life to live — his or her own. To accept that fact, and to live it is to receive grace and to discover that all of life is good. And when we die to our illusions that life is any other way than that, we discover the secret of all life — to die is to live. We are those who name that happening the Jesus Christ Event and reclaim for our time the message of the Biblical people.

This statement is the center of the Gospel message.

Jesus states:

I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, where are you going? But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

John 16:4-7

Jesus is saying to his friends, "I have to go. If I do not go, it will be too easy for you to rely upon me to solve your problems or to answer all your questions for you." Jesus asks his friends, the disciples, to move from visible companionship to inner communion.

You and I have not had the benefit of seeing Jesus personally, but we do have his teachings — his life — as an example.

Jesus asks us in this passage not just to learn from his teaching, not just to be exposed to a little of his life, but to *internalize* Christ's message.

The only way to internalize that message is for Jesus the Christ to go away so that the Counselor — the

Let there be no limit to what we take to God in prayer, so that there may be no limit to God's reign and rule in all of life. It is far better to ask God for whatever we desire than to play God by deciding on our own what we ought to pray for. That would simply be pious magic all over again, wanting to control God by praying for the right things in a way that is sure to get results. God will be the judge; ours is the task of putting everything up to God.

The Treasure Chest: A Heritage Album

Ethical response begins by determining our gifts and offering them to God by offering our gifts to those around us. In that way, it is possible for us to move from imitation to discipleship.

Secondly, we must continue to be led both in the presence and the absence of God. And lastly, ask in all things and we shall receive as Christ's promise to us.

- ¹ Dorothee Soelle. *Suffering*. Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1975, p. 155.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- ³ Jurgen Habermas. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Beacon Press, Boston, 1968, p. 194.
- ⁴ Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 200.

A Review:

F. Jay Deacon

Thomas M. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*. Philadelphia: Westminster; 1978. 163 pp; \$5.95, paper.

TOM HORNER, A NEW YORK Episcopal priest-professor, has given us, at last, the first adequate treatment of the biblical data related to homosexuality. It is unquestionably the best work to date on the subject, and he claims to have spent "almost every waking hour in the past two years" working on it. He earned his PhD in a joint Columbia University/Union Theological Seminary program, and did post-doctoral work at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. He is also the author of *Sex in the Bible*.

By providing a solid base of background discussion on the ancient Middle East and its religious tradition, reflecting the kind of familiarity with the material other authors have lacked, Horner is able to shed massive -- and, importantly, well-documented -- light on biblical data including the familiar Old and New Testament references, and some less frequently discussed passages, in particular, the David and Jonathan and the Ruth and Naomi narratives.

Horner's methodology is to relate the Middle Eastern scene to the text about Jonathan and David to demonstrate that from the Gilga-

mesh Epic onward, homosexuality was integral and familiar to the biblical world. He concludes: "There can be little doubt . . . except on the part of those who absolutely refuse to believe it, that there existed a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan" (20). Homosexual love was considered both manly and dignified, even associated with heroes, and would certainly have been considered appropriate for the Old Testament's greatest hero.

From here, Horner can proceed to other biblical tests with the confidence that the biblical world would not have found homosexuality remarkable or objectionable.

His careful treatment of the Hebrew and Greek texts is consistently maintained from his discussion of the Jonathan-David-Saul story through his concluding discussion of Jesus in the Gospels. His comprehension of the *politics* of David-Saul-Jonathan is particularly important, and would not be possible without his comprehension of the ancient Middle East.

The Sodom and Gibeah narratives occasion a Horner dissent from the standard gay apologetic; and it seems to me one of Horner's better contributions toward the cleaning up of gay Christians' apologetic act. My last attempt to claim that the *yadha* ("know") language in Gen. 19 is not a sexual reference occurred before 25 smart evangelical

Yale law students, and I won't try it again. So I find Horner's exegesis refreshing. The inhospitality, corruption, and general degradation of the men of Sodom was clearly expressed in an attempt at homosexual rape. No, they didn't just want to meet the angelic visitors, or check their ID's. But homosexuality is never the biblical target for judgment, but the abusive, ugly act of rape and the attitude behind it. To rape a guest IS inhospitable! (A persuasive Horner argument is his appeal to a hermeneutical principle I learned years ago: one looks first to the immediate context for clues to the translation of a word. In both Gen 19 and parallel form Judges 19, *yadha* is indisputable a sexual reference. The same holds true in the Gen 6 incident.) We ought not discredit an otherwise strong case by continuing to claim that the men of Sodom had no sexual intent.

Israel's criminal laws, in the Old Covenant Code (Ex 20:22-23:33) and in Deut 12-26 contain no condemnation of homosexuality, but later priestly laws of Leviticus do. This, however, occurs within an entirely cultic context, tied up with the word *to 'ebah*, "abomination," implying "idolatry". Horner constructs a picture of what the abomination, or idolatrous offense, was about. A word that the King James translates "sodomite," throughout the Old Testament condemnations,

is involved. It's "kedeshim," and it refers to temple-related prostitutes and "dog-priests" whose originally Canaanite cultic practices had come to permeate Israel. These "kedeshim" or "sodomites" had sacrificed to the service of the Goddess their manhood, becoming eunuchs — and that is how Horner understands the object of Old Testament condemnations. Homosexual cultic practices associated with foreign cults are called "abominations" in the Old Testament.

But the decree about homosexuality in Lev 20:13 reaches beyond temple prostitution. It could not have existed at an earlier stage of Israel's history, argues Horner, than the immediate postexilic period, about 520 BC or later. Homosexuality was a part of biblical history to the end of the Judean monarchy. The Babylonian Exile would not have permitted the Jews to determine who did nor did not deserve the death penalty. So the Lev 20:13 decree must be later than that.

Beginning at 539 BC, the "tolerant" Persian period of captivity would have permitted such legislation on the part of the Jews, and it explains the bias represented by Lev 20:13. Because the Persians "were far from tolerant . . . where homosexuality was concerned. In fact, no people in history, not even the Romans during their early days, were more opposed to homosexuality than those Aryan shepherds" (77).

The period of "reform" under Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther is a time of housecleaning to prevent another catastrophe — since the Jews saw the 587 fall of Jerusalem as a judgment. Now, it began to be said, Sodom had fallen because of homosexuality. We don't know much about the Persian period (539-333 BC) — but it held incalculable significance, as the tight-assed Zoroastrian morality influenced the *written* Old Testament. The Persians, argues Horner, were highly patriarchal — and so quite different from earlier matriarchal societies. The morality of the Vendidad colored what we know through the Old Testament of ancient Hebrew religion. And Zoroastrianism was heavily dualist, viewing bodily passions with distrust and contempt. And what WE know of Judaism did not exist until after this influence,

whose awesome scope no one can calculate.

This, and not some aversion to unprovable anal rape committed upon Jewish captives, or the undemonstrated assertion that the male seed was seen as the all-important thing in reproduction, or a sensed need for procreation (homosexual activity never precluded marriage), swayed the Old Testament bias. It was a cultic bias, and, not unlike modern bias, related to machismo — but for the Old Testament, Persian machismo.

Here I think Horner must whitewash our own Judaic tradition just a tad. Was the rise of machismo and patriarch really all the Persians' fault? Clearly, the Persian influence was partially responsible. I do not doubt that at this stage of Israel's development, toleration for homosexual acts and vestiges of the once-dominant matriarchal, Goddess-worshipping societies remained live factors in Hebrew society. The Canaanites and others whose millennial rites and customs the Hebrews had violently and ruthlessly crushed had left their influence in their own homeland. But the time has come for us who claim the biblical faith to admit that our own Old Testament history is a bloody tale of the invasion of a highly developed matriarchal homeland by a people who, by insisting that God's true identity is masculine, generated much of the machismo-oriented value system that cannot tolerate homosexuality. For balance I urge the study of Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Harvest paperback, 1978, \$3.95 (or original Dial Press hardbound). (Ms Stone's excellent scholarship would have been more effectively delivered were it not for her incredibly imprecise citations of sources and quotes.)

The New Testament receives the direct attention of a third of Horner's text. He suggests latent passive homosexuality is evident in patterns of both Paul's life and his attitudes toward sex. Paul's aversion to sex may have to do with his expectation of the end of time, and his dualistic view of flesh as evil.

Now Horner affords helpful background of the quality that made his Old Testament work so illuminating. He explores rituals de-

signed to purify the souls of those living in the Greek-influenced eastern half of the Roman Empire.

These included the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis, near Athens; and variations of the Orphic cult and others in Greece, and the Sun worship in Rome. These straightlaced cults coexisted with the old fertility cults and were sometimes blended into one, as at Eleusis. The Isis and Phrygian Cybele cults demonstrate asceticism and licentiousness side by side. Some of Paul's strongest religious competitors included in their worship homosexual orgies, whose castrated debauchees he attacked. Interestingly, Lucius Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, perhaps our best source on these practices, describes activities in and around Corinth!

Not all the cults that involved male prostitution, but that was always available on the secular market. Greeks never frowned on that, but Romans did, at least officially.

Roman laws against homosexual behavior cannot be taken too seriously, but other indicators tell us of a real stigma. Yet, something about Roman culture seemed to enjoy forbidden fruits the most, and a popular game among the Romans having to do with vices and virtues may have influenced the New Testament "vice lists." We don't know how the game was played, but it was heavy on "naughties," not virtues. A particular kind of "counter" was built for the game listing vices in Latin — and a few virtues.

1 Cor 6:9f follows the game counters with certain changes, since Corinthians would recognize what he was doing. We don't. Nor are we familiar, as was Paul, with Stoic lists of excesses contrary to reason. Two words in Paul's list in 1 Cor 6 come from the game counters, as do most of the terms he lists, but the two that most affect our discussion are "malakoi" and "arsenokoitai" which combine to mean passive and active partners, respectively, in the context of homosexual prostitution — if Horner's conclusions are correct. Put together, he argues, the two words have this technical connotation.

Paul seems to lash out not only at the religious cultic practice, though. In order to understand Paul's hostility to the subject, one must understand that Paul viewed

the flesh as evil in a dualistic sense, and that he does not recommend sex on any account as desirable.

This backdrop, argues Horner, is all the more reason to note Jesus' attitudes toward sexuality, and the body, and relationships, and sin, and love. Against all the complex and negative biblical data, Jesus' views cannot help but come as refreshing good news! †

The Rev. F. Jay Deacon

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

is a journal of theological reflection for the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Because it is an open forum for thought, the views expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the position of TGC or of the Fellowship. Also, the appearance of a name in this magazine does not denote sexual orientation.

Articles and comments are encouraged and should be addressed to: Rev. F. Jay Deacon, Box 2390, Chicago, IL 60690.

Editor
F. Jay Deacon

ADVENT

Keeping the Church Year

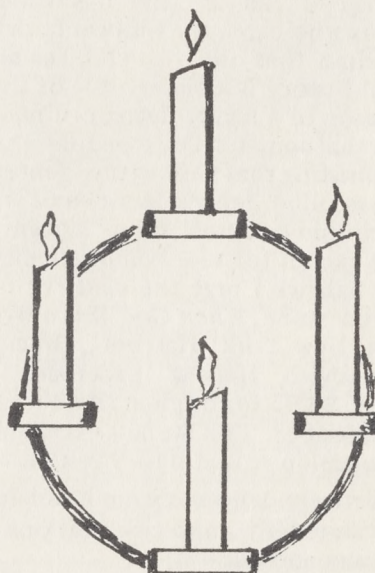
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Advent is known, and yet not known. To some it is merely a name; to others it is a beautiful custom, a lovely practice. Most of us have taken little time, if indeed any, to learn the history of the season or ponder its significance.

Advent does have a history, however, and an interesting one. Just as the calendar year is marked off into seasons, which more or less prescribe secular interest, so the year also has seasons which annually inspire moods for worship. Focusing on incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus, these worship seasons establish what is known as the Church Year. It begins with the season of Advent when we ask God to 'stir up our hearts' in preparation for the fulfillment of God's promise — a son who will be called the Prince of Peace, the 'great light' for those who walk in darkness.

To begin with, Advent season as we now know it does not go back to the beginning of the Christian Era. It may come as a surprise, or even a shock, to learn that the date for the celebration of Christmas has not always been December 25th. There was a time, for instance, when Christmas was celebrated on the sixth of January. The Church year took form only gradually, and even today it is not uniform everywhere.

Although it begins the Church Year, Advent did not become a part of the Church Calendar until the Festival of Christmas had been established. That came about in the fourth century. For the early church, Easter was the major Christian festival.



To some, Advent is a period of fasting, as during the period of Lent. In 1622 the English Book of Common Prayer stated that "Advent Sunday is always the Sunday nearest to the Feast of St. Andrew (November 30), whether before or after."

The Advent wreath is a contribution of the German and Scandinavian traditions. The evergreen of the wreath represents the life that is found in Christ. And the circle of the wreath symbolizes eternal life. The Advent candles are symbolic

of the coming of Jesus, the living light of the world.

He is the light that broke forth on the world on the first Christmas when he was born as Prince of Peace. He is the light that gradually penetrated into all the world. The traditional act of lighting one more candle each week — or each day — tells of the increasingly brighter light of his coming, and leads gradually to the blaze of light at the dawning of Christmas.

To some, it is traditional to use four white or red candles, and to others it is traditional to use purple, pink, and then white, after all four have been lighted.

The four candles for the four weeks of Advent have a specific meaning. The first has been called the Prophecy Candle, lighted by a small child, announcing the period of waiting. The second is the Bethlehem Candle, lighted by an older person, symbolic of the preparations being made to receive and to cradle the Christ child. The third is a pink Shepherd's Candle, lighted by a mother, which typifies the act of sharing Christ on Gaudete Sunday. And the fourth is the Angels' Candle, lighted by a father or the pastor, and typifies love and final coming.

After the wreath is blessed by the minister, the traditional lighting of the candle takes place each Sunday until all four candles are lighted. The purple and pink candles are then replaced by white at Christmas. The white candles are lighted on Christmas Eve and signify that God's Son is the Light of the World. †

COMMUNICATIONS

G=A=P

UFMCC OFFICES RELOCATE

The UFMCC has relocated the General Offices to 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA. To the office personnel, this is a welcome change from the old location which, according to one employee, 'lacked the basic requisites for human dignity.'

The offices on west 9th were housed in a building primarily occupied by garment industry 'sweatshops'. Inadequate plumbing and electrical facilities, unreliable elevator service (as anyone who has ever had to make the hike to the 6th floor will agree), and roaches were only a few of the difficulties encountered by the office staff. The modern new location has boosted the staff morale and, with a six year lease, provides an exciting and stable setting for the work of the UFMCC's general office personnel.

FELLOWSHIP GROWTH STRAINS EXECUTIVE OFFICES — ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES ESTABLISHED

The move is just one step in implementing the decision of the Board of Elders to establish Administrative offices with specific assignments designed to meet the growing responsibilities and priorities of the Fellowship.

When Troy Perry organized MCC-LA, no one dreamed that it would grow to include over 112 congregations in just ten short years. As the Fellowship grew the emphasis was on finding qualified people to pastor churches rather than on developing administrative systems. The Fellowship offices began in Rev. Perry's study, and, until 1975 when the Rev. Elder Richard Vincent joined the staff, the Rev. Perry and his secretary handled all the official business of the Fellowship. As the years progressed, and as the UFMCC continued its phenomenal growth, the office staff tried to adapt to meet the ever increasing and changing needs of the churches. Their efforts were not always visible. After all, how could two people keep up with what the National Council of Churches at one time called 'the fastest growing denomination in this country'.

In 1970 each of the UFMCC's nine church groups were represented at the first General Conference; today there are 112. There were only 7 ministers at that first conference (4 ordained and 3 licensed); today there are 158 professional clergy in the UFMCC.

Mix this growth with an abundance of work to be done, a shortage of experienced personnel, a burning urgency to do God's work and we can easily see the be-

by Donna J. Wade

ggings of the proverbial 'communications gap'.

One of my favorite lines from the movie 'Cool Hand Luke' is *what we have here is a failure to communicate*. Well, what we have in the UFMCC offices is a few overworked people trying to keep up with all the overworked people in the field, all of whom are dedicated to doing the best jobs they can. What seems to be bureaucratic red-tape to many in the field is often the only vehicle through which the office staff can recognize and try to meet the needs of those it is to serve. Through increased communications we will begin to see the feelings of both office and field personnel better understood.

ELDERS ADDRESS COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS

At their September 1978 meeting the Board of Elders began to address the structure of the administrative offices and the communications breakdown, and took the initial steps to resolve the difficulties. A study prepared prior to the meeting revealed that at least six full-time employees are needed to just maintain the basic functions of the offices. The current administrative staff is comprised of three persons, one of whom must be assigned full time to the switchboard. (The remaining UFMCC staff are employed in the Executive Offices with the Rev. Perry and the Rev. James Sandmire, and in the Board of Institutional Ministry (USA).

ADMINISTRATOR NAMED

The Elders are continuing to reassess the allocation of available resources in an attempt to provide more adequate staffing. The Elders will continue to function as outlined in the By-laws and will establish the priorities and the task assignments to be completed, much the same as the Board of Directors of a corporation functions. To coordinate the various office tasks and provide the support necessary for the work of the Commissions and Committees the Board of Elders has named as Administrator, the Rev. Carol Cureton. The Administrator is charged with the responsibility of fulfilling the task assignments outlined by the Board of Elders, with complete adherence to their priorities. The Administrator is responsible to the Board of Elders and must report the status of all projects and activities quarterly, or more frequently if requested.

FUNCTIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES DEFINED

The following comprise only a part of the tasks handled by the UFMCC administrative staff:

- * maintain listings of location, address and phone numbers for all congregations and ministers
- * maintain five major mailing lists
- * design, print and supply report forms and certificates, etc.
- * administer group insurance program
- * handle telephone calls (approx. 2000 per month)
- * maintain records of the activities and personnel of the UFMCC's 22 committees and commissions
- * compile and supply the decisions and directives of General Conference
- * publish IN UNITY (the editor would like to comment that it takes nearly 240 hours to get one 28 page issue to press and that's IF others in the Fellowship do part of the writing)
- * respond to general correspondence
- * coordinate ministers' conferences
- * even a partial listing would be incomplete without saying, as did one member of the staff, 'just being here when our people in the field need a voice and some one who cares.'

RESOURCE PACKETS ENDORSED AS COMMUNICATIONS KEY

Perhaps one of the most significant projects endorsed by the Board of Elders is that of RESOURCE PACKETS. A key to sharing the valuable information and experience of various committees, commissions, individuals and church groups the Resource Packets will contain as much information as possible about their specific subject matter. As an integral part of their task assignments, the various commissions and committees will be asked to compile information for these packets. Topics such as (but not limited to) Alcoholism, Conflict Mediation, Stewardship, Racism, Agism, Inclusive Language, Homosexuality and Scripture, Membership Classes, Holy Unions, etc., will be developed. This is not an attempt to force uniformity on MCC groups — rather, it is a way of providing various options from which the laity and clergy can choose that which best suits their local needs and circumstances. (If you are working with a commission or committee and have not heard of this concept before, please don't be upset. As we practice

continued on page 31

MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORTS

Even though there was no General Conference this summer, it was necessary for the Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee to meet, to insure the continuance of the credentialing process for professional clergy in the Universal Fellowship. The entire committee of nine members met for the five day period, July 24 -- 28.

The first items of business dealt directly with credentialing. The entire MCAC reviewed the decisions of the District Review Committees. Because of a technicality in the credentialing procedures of the Fellowship, the MCAC was prevented, in many cases, from taking definitive action on its own, and had to abide by the decisions of the DRC's. This situation arose most frequently in the area of initial licensing. This problem was noted, and thoroughly discussed with three members of the Board of Elders. The MCAC also considered all clergy appeals regarding licensing, and made final decisions involving charges filed against two ordained ministers. It was also the task of the committee to interview a few ministers seeking relicensing — those who had been out of town or otherwise unable to meet with the DRC. Once the agenda items were completed, the committee caringly continued the review of the Fellowship clergy. With the help of the Concerns Sub-Committee, it was decided to contact certain clergy, to offer our individual and collective help and support.

Out of the work mentioned above, the need developed for numerous changes. Recommendations regarding these changes were forwarded to either the Board of Elders or the By-Laws Committee. Foremost of all issues was the updating of the Procedures for Licensing, Re-Licensing, and Ordination of persons to the Professional Ministry. In an all morning work session, the committee met with Elders Perry, Sandmire, and Cureton to discuss the new procedures needed, in light of the committee's acceptance of new Standards for the Professional Ministry, as submitted by the Sub-Committee on Standards. Needless to say, the joint meeting with representatives of the Board of Elders covered a great deal more than just updating procedural matters. The other main topic discussed was the structure and functioning of the MCAC itself. Resultant recommendations from this session were to be sent to the full Board of Elders for review and implementation, and to the By-Laws Committee for their consideration and future proposal to the General Conference.

During the week, advisory letters and memos were drafted and reviewed by the committee. For once we wanted to be sure that the necessary information would definitely get to the persons/committees affected. Letters in response to questions were sent to churches, and clergy, other inquiries from clergy applying for ordination candidacy, the DRC's, and the Committee on World Church Extension, were answered. Samaritan Theological Institute was also consulted regarding its role in making available, and teaching, the required material to satisfy the soon-to-be-in-effect new Standards for clergy.

New questions and problems were also considered by the committee near the end of the five day period. These issues fell into the area of "homework", and, although some initial plans were mapped out, no definite decisions were reached. Among the topics dealt with were the need for defining such terms as "leave of absence" (voluntary and disciplinary) and "sabbatical leave". Along with these definitions will come the need to outline the procedures to be followed to insure orderly follow-through. For the first time, the committee had just been faced with the hearing of charges against two ordained ministers. We recognized a need to better define the process and procedures as outlined in the By-Laws, and seek General Conference approval of changes which were necessary. Because of repeated confusion and lack of uniformity, the MCAC began discussion of formulating suggested procedures for church groups to follow, when faced with the need to fill a vacant pulpit. More precise definitions were also discussed for "Worship Coordinator", "Interim Pastor", "Pastor", "Minister in Residence", "Pastor Emeritus", etc. Of course, there would be the ongoing need to implement the newly approved Standards for the Professional Ministry, and to constantly re-evaluate and revise those standards. A part of this process would be the development of tests and various Fellowship forms.

Finally, the committee dealt with the areas of budgetary need for the upcoming operational expenses of the committee, and established the beginning of a recorded history of the work of the committee, for future reference.

As should be obvious by now, the committee had plenty of tasks to tackle! With some pride, it is pleasing to report that all necessary decision-making was accomplished, and great strides were made for pending plans to be finalized. Another cause for pride was the sense of cohesive unity and cooperation that developed during the five day period. That does not mean, however, that we always agreed on every issue. In fact, there was always some "voice of opposite opinion" to be heard.

The committee hopes to gather together a few days prior to the official beginning of the General Conference in Los Angeles next summer, and during the three to five day period, deal with the credentialing work that will be submitted to the committee. This would then free the MCAC members to meet during the conference to finalize some of the other issues raised in this article. On behalf of the entire committee, I want to thank all church bodies, laity, and clergy who have supported us in our important work, and who have taken the time and interest to share with us their suggestions, ideas, and questions. Continue to be the caring Fellowship you have shown to be in the past!

†
The Rev. John Gill

The Fellowship Family

NEWS AND NOTES OF MCC PEOPLE AND EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD

25 New Ministers Licensed

EDITOR'S NOTE: In years past, General Conferences afforded MCC members the opportunity to get acquainted with the ministers licensed at the respective conferences. At its July meeting, the Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee approved the licensure of 25 new ministers. Since there is no General Conference this year, the following biographical profiles are offered in an attempt to introduce our new ministers to our members.

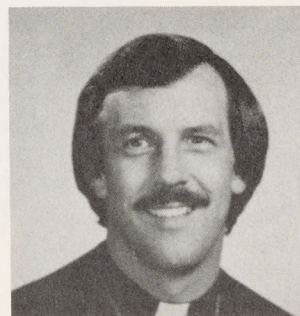
THE REV. MARY CATHERINE MORRIS (26) is on the staff of MCC New Orleans, LA where her areas of responsibility include Wednesday evening worship services, teaching membership classes, women's outreach, and others. She has attended Samaritan Theological Institute, Notre Dame Seminary (New Orleans), and Sacramento (CA) City College. A former Catholic, the Rev. Morris has also served as an Exhorter at MCC Sacramento, where she was involved in numerous areas, including her position as secretary to the Rev. Elder Freda Smith ("for as long as I could keep up with her"). The Rev. Morris entered the ministry because she "always wanted people to really know that there is God, and in God there is love, and all the fruits thereof. I decided to become a minister after a beautiful experience with God that said to me 'you can do it if you try.'" The greatest asset to her ministry, she feels, is her "gift of faith . . . and, I don't give up easily." The Rev. Morris feels the main purpose of the UFMCC is to "continue to be an ecclesiastical church, never stopping on the letter, always leaning on the Spirit; giving itself, as many churches no longer know how, to as many people as it can possibly touch."



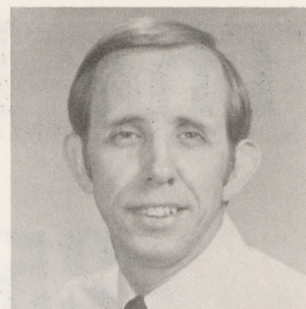
THE REV. NANCY LILA RADCLYFFE (AVARD) (34) is the Worship Coordinator for MCC of Christ the Liberator in Princeton, NJ. She has served as an Exhorter at MCC Hartford, CT, and MCC Brooklyn, NY. The Rev. Radclyffe, a former Presbyterian, holds a B.A. in Sociology from Park College in Parkville, MO, and is working toward a Masters of Divinity degree at Union Theological Seminary. Regarding her call to the ministry, she states, "I was called to the ministry at age 7 when I was baptized . . . I couldn't answer that call until I discovered I was gay and then found MCC." The Rev. Radclyffe feels her greatest personal asset to her ministry is her "commitment to my calling, which is coupled with an organizational ability which helps me pull a church together and help it grow." She changed her name (from Avard to Radclyffe) because she "wanted a name which reflected my personal identity, which I developed apart from my father and his name . . . Radclyffe comes from Radclyffe Hall, author of *The Well of Loneliness*." She feels the main purpose of the UFMCC is "to spread the Good News of the Gospel to ALL people, especially sexual minorities."



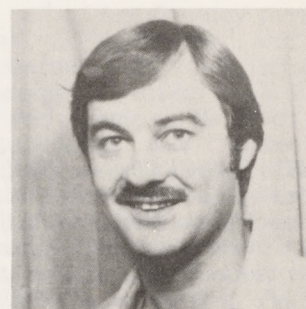
THE REV. KEN STORER (38) is the Worship Coordinator for the MCC at Boise, Idaho, and prior to licensure, he served as an Exhorter for MCC Salt Lake City, Utah, where his responsibilities included coordinating evening worship and church membership. The Rev. Storer is a former Mormon, and holds both a B.A. (in History) and an M.A. (in Organizational Behavior) from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. He is the former Director of the Gay Community Service Center in Salt Lake City, and became a minister in response to "God's call". Prior to entering the ministry, the Rev. Storer was employed as an organizational development consultant. He believes the goal of the UFMCC is "to establish and maintain an environment in which each of us can develop a personal relationship with our Creator and Jesus Christ — an environment in which we can maximize our individual created potential."



THE REV. JEFF BISHOP (37) is the Interim Pastor for MCC Austin, TX, and has served as an Exhorter and church secretary for MCC Houston, TX. Presently employed as a university professor, he holds a B.A. in Government from Sam Houston State University, a B.A. in Religious Studies from American Christian School of Religion (correspondence), as well as an M.A. (in Government) and Ph.D (in Latin American Studies) from Louisiana State University. The Rev. Bishop, formerly active in the Methodist Church, believes his "background of diverse experience" is the greatest asset to his ministry, and feels the purpose of the UFMCC is to "preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ . . . currently our outreach is largely to the homosexual community . . . eventually we will be reaching out more to all of God's children without any special emphasis."



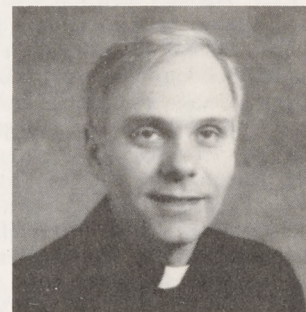
THE REV. JOSEPH W. HOULE (31) Is a member of MCC Pittsburgh, PA, and is Campus Chaplain to the University of Pittsburgh. He is on the Board of Directors of Persad Center, Inc., a counseling center for sexual minorities, and is presently involved in the formation of a trans-denominational organization, Religious Leaders Concerned For Gay Rights. The Rev. Houle feels that entering the ministry "is God's will for my life", and believes his greatest personal asset regarding his ministry is "a sensitivity to human needs." The Rev. Houle holds a B.A. in French and Latin from College of St. Thomas (St. Paul, MN), and an M.A. in French from Middlebury College Graduate School of French in France (Paris). He has also taken courses from the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in Pittsburgh, and Southern Baptist Seminaries (Seminary Extension Dept.) in Nashville, TN. A former Roman Catholic, the Rev. Houle is a language teacher, and serves as a member of the UFMCC Board of Campus Ministry. He believes the main purpose of the UFMCC is "to lead people to Jesus Christ."



THE REV. ELSIE "LISA" BERRY (40) is a member of MCC Miami, FL where her primary area of responsibility is that church's nursing home ministry. A former Methodist, the Rev. Berry holds an A.A. degree from Miami-Dade Community College, and she graduated with honors from Florida International University where she earned a B.A. in Religious Studies and a B.S. in Special Education. The Rev. Berry serves as a volunteer telephone crisis counselor with Switchboard of Miami. She entered the ministry "because God wouldn't let me say 'NO' ". She feels the problems she has encountered are an asset to her ministry because "they have given me a basis for understanding the problems of others." The Rev. Berry believes the main purpose of the UFMCC is "to help people to understand that God's love is for everyone."



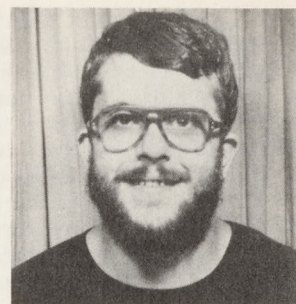
THE REV. DAVID L. KROMER (40) is a member of MCC Baltimore, MD, and entered the ministry "to preach, teach, love, and serve as a member of God's kingdom." The Rev. Kromer feels the greatest personal asset to his ministry is his "faith in the constant love of God." He has attended Thiel College, Trenton State University, the University of Maryland, and Catholic University, and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree. He served the congregation of MCC Washington, D.C. as an Exhorter, and is an airline employee. The Rev. Kromer is a former Lutheran, and believes the main goal of the UFMCC is telling "the whole world of the love of God for all."



THE REV. DONNA M. VINSON (36) is a new addition to Emmaus MCC in Miami Beach, FL, having served as a Deacon in MCC Tampa for three years, where she was founder and advisor to the Young Adults Organization, and worked with the choir. Formerly a member of the Catholic Church, the Rev. Vinson has an A.A. degree in Pre-Teaching from Hillsborough Community College. In her opinion, the main purpose of the UFMCC "is to bring ALL people to the full realization that we are all siblings in the family of God", and that her greatest personal contribution to that goal is her "enthusiasm". The Rev. Vinson adds that "being a minister is my fulfillment; the reason I am . . . if I had never gone into the ministry, I would never have become a complete person."



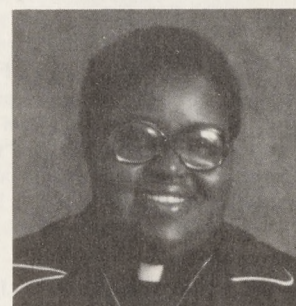
THE REV. DAVID M. PELLETIER (26) is the Worship Coordinator for MCC St. Louis, MO, and he entered the ministry in response to "God's call to serve all people." The Rev. Pelletier holds a B.A. degree from Concordia Senior College (Ft. Wayne, IN), and a Masters of Divinity degree from Christ Seminary — Seminex (St. Louis, MO). In addition to his pastoral duties, the Rev. Pelletier is a member of the Midcontinent Life Services Corp., the Missouri Coalition For Human Rights, and the Missouri Equal Rights Amendment Coalition. He formerly served MCC San Antonio, TX as District Liaison Officer, and is a former Lutheran. The Rev. Pelletier believes the purpose of the UFMCC is to "spread the good news of reconciliation to all people" and feels his "jack (or joan)-of-all-trade-ness" is an important component of his ministry.



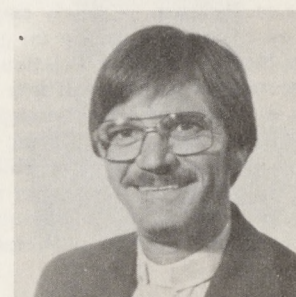
THE REV. JEAN MARIE BUSH (32) is a member of MCC Tampa, FL, where her duties include scheduling of ministerial staff, Vice-Chairperson of the Task Force on Women, and Chairperson of the Maintenance Crew, in addition to her other ministerial responsibilities. She was a charter member of MCC St. Louis, MO where she served in many capacities; served the Tampa church as an Exhorter for two years prior to licensing, and entered the ministry because "I feel God has called me to a life of service in this Fellowship." She feels the greatest asset to her ministry is "a new sensitivity and awareness, which enables me to be more receptive to God's will in my personal life; as a result, this perception has better qualified me to meet the spiritual needs of others." The Rev. Bush has attended Bailey Technical School (St. Louis, MO), St. Petersburg (FL) Junior College, and has taken correspondence courses from the UFMCC's Samaritan Theological Institute. The Rev. Bush, a former Roman Catholic, feels that the purpose of the UFMCC is "that of a missionary church, to seek out those unaware of the joy of knowing Christ as their Savior, and bring them to God through Christian worship and study. I see the ultimate goal of this Fellowship as a church that has reached and served not only the homophile community, but all minorities and oppressed persons, on an international plane."



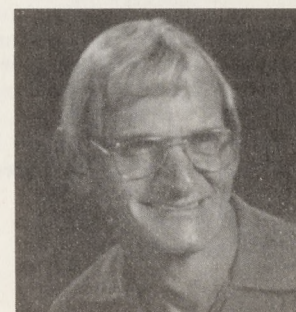
THE REV. DELORES P. BERRY (27) is a member of MCC Baltimore, MD, and has served that congregation as a member of the Board of Directors, Choir Director, and as a member of the Social and Worship committees. She studied in the field of Arts and Sciences at the Community College of Baltimore, and has received ministerial training through the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Employed in the nursing field, the Rev. Berry is also involved with community organizations such as the Gay Community Center of Baltimore and the Coalition of Black Gays; she is also a member of the National Association of Christians and Jews. She entered the ministry because she believes she was "called to aid others in their spiritual growth, and called to preach and tell of the salvation found in Jesus Christ." The Rev. Berry believes the main purpose of the UFMCC is "to spread the word of Christ, and also to work for the freedom of all people."



THE REV. LOUIS VESTAL DE SPAIN (43) is an accountant who has studied business administration, commercial art, clothing design, and journalism in addition to his course work in theology, Bible History, and archaeology at Apostolic College in San Francisco. Previously affiliated with the United Pentecostal and Congregational Methodist churches, the Rev. de Spain served as an Exhorter for MCC San Francisco. He entered the ministry because of "a fire shut up in the bones that only ministry can alleviate." The Rev. de Spain hopes to use his "ability to deal lovingly, gently, and fairly with people in pain" to further the purpose of the UFMCC, which he perceives as "to bring the full gospel of Christ to those heretofore denied and rejected . . . and to raise the consciousness level of the religious community, impelling us forward toward primitive (pure or simple) Christianity."



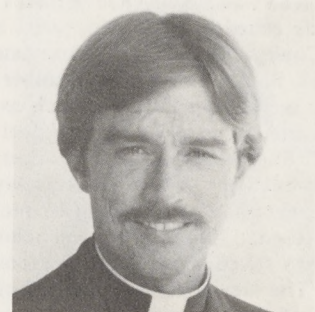
THE REV. PAUL MCCREARY (58) is a member of MCC Tampa, FL, and is Chairperson of the UFMCC Task Force on Aging. His areas of responsibility within the Tampa church include assisting the pastor with worship services, hospital visitation, and nursing home outreach. The Rev. McCreary is currently an honor student at Hillsborough Community College (Tampa), and was formerly the Worship Coordinator for MCC of the Palms in Ft. Myers, FL. He entered the ministry "in order to fulfill the call of God of long standing . . . the answer to God's call is overdue primarily because of prior schooling that a gay person could not be a Christian, much less a minister." The Rev. McCreary believes the purpose of the UFMCC is "to reach out to ALL people with the message of salvation and God's love for humankind", and feels his "desire to serve, teach, and work for the Lord in this Fellowship" will help accomplish that goal.



THE REV. ANNE MARIE KEAST (30) is Co-Pastor of MCC Louisville, KY with her spouse, the Rev. Sandy Taylor. She holds a B.A. in Sociology and Psychology from Madonna College in Livonia, MI. A former Catholic, the Rev. Keast feels her greatest personal asset to her ministry is "my honesty, which frees me so I can be me and love, enjoy, be compassionate, sincere, sensitive, and live life." She entered the ministry "after giving up my will and 'letting God' I've answered God's calling for me — I've become a minister to answer my call in life." Prior to the move to Kentucky, the Rev. Keast served as an Exhorter for MCC Detroit. She is a member of the American Occupational Therapist Association. She has also received two awards for her achievements in wood sculpture. The Rev. Keast believes the main goal of the UFMCC is to "spread the message of God to ALL people; not to try to be popular, but always to be about the work of the Lord."



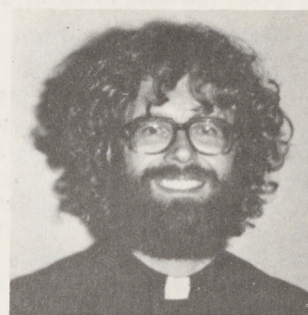
THE REV. D. DENNIS CHAPPELL (29) is a member of MCC San Diego, CA, and entered the ministry "to comply with what I feel God's purpose is for my life. Moreover, to allow the 'mustard seed' to grow into what it was intended to be." He holds a B.A. in Business Administration (Education) from Wartburg Lutheran College in Waverly, Iowa, and is employed as a production manager for Travelodge International. The Rev. Chappell served as an Exhorter for MCC San Diego, and was the Chairperson of the Stewardship Committee there for three years. He believes his "good administrative background" is a great asset to his ministry. The Rev. Chappell believes the purpose of the UFMCC is to "take an active interest in and participate in the civil and human liberties of minority and discriminated peoples. To share with all people the knowledge that we are all children of God and free to feel the warmth and love that Jesus has promised to ALL who would believe in Him."



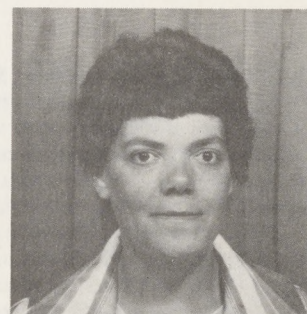
THE REV. SANDRA KAY TAYLOR (30) is the Co-Pastor of MCC Louisville, KY, and holds a B.A. in Religious Education from Midwestern College. She is working toward a Masters degree in Social Work at Wayne State University. Regarding her call to the ministry, she states: "At a very young age, I claimed God's love and God's calling to the ministry. I soon discovered many obstacles and persons who would deny my relationship and calling to God, but the UFMCC provided the love and strength I needed, and no one can take that from me because the UFMCC is ordained of God." Employed as a group therapist, the Rev. Taylor feels her greatest asset to her ministry is her "sensitivity in working with individuals and groups . . . an awareness of my own needs and others'." She believes the main goal of the UFMCC is "the sharing of the Gospel of God's love with all people, and establishing, through God's love, a unity of worship, sharing and growing — whole persons in a whole community." The Rev. Taylor has served MCC Detroit, MI as an staff minister and Exhorter, prior to her duties in Louisville.



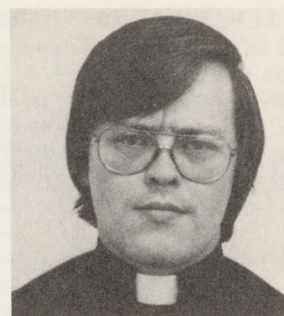
THE REV. BOB FREEMAN — JONES (32) is the Worship Coordinator of MCC Syracuse, NY, and holds a B.A. in social sciences from Southwestern College in Winfield, KS. He has also attended Boston University School of Theology, and Onondaga Community College in Syracuse. Secularly employed as a psychiatric nurse, the Rev. Freeman-Jones serves as a resource person on gay topics for Planned Parenthood and the Onondaga County Mental Health Association. Regarding His call to the ministry, he states: "The imperative of Christ's gospel of love and liberation is as strong today as in Jesus' time. The church is meant to be a community of healing and reconciliation. I feel led to contribute my meager energies to help bring the dominion of God into reality on this earth." The Rev. Freeman-Jones feels his "ability to work lovingly and constructively with different types of people" will be an asset to the main purpose of the UFMCC, which he perceives as "to show by example, and direct action, that God's love is inclusive; to lead the way in ministries to and with the neglected of our society."



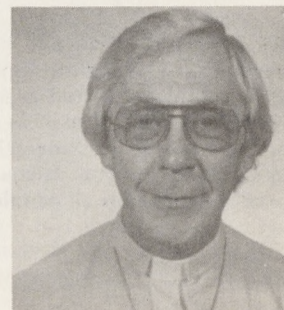
THE REV. JEAN A. WHITE (37), a member of MCC London, grew up in an evangelical home and became a Christian in her early teens. She obtained a three-year general nursing degree from London Teaching Hospital, her Midwifery Certificate from Bristol Maternity Hospital, and has done course work in the area of tropical diseases. After the completion of her nursing training, the Rev. White spent two years in the International Bible Training Institute, training to be a missionary. She served as a medical missionary in Macau S.E. Asia for over six years. The Rev. White is presently employed as the Chief Nursing Administrator at Welbeck Maternity Hospital. She has served MCC London in various capacities, and is presently the Treasurer of the World Church Extension Committee in Britain.



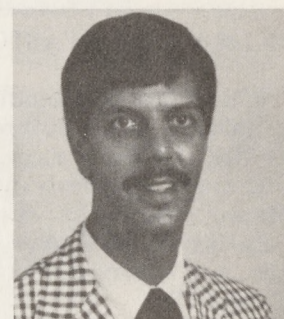
THE REV. RAYMOND A. ROGERS (31) is the Assistant Pastor of MCC Ottawa, Canada, and entered the ministry "to preach the Gospel." He is a former Anglican, and feels his greatest personal asset regarding his ministry is his "deep personal faith and a sense of where people are at in their lives". The Rev. Rogers believes the main goal of the UFMCC is "to bring Christ's message of love and forgiveness to all those who have been excluded from the mainstream of Christianity for centuries." He is a former civil servant, and has worked with retarded children and handicapped adults in the community.



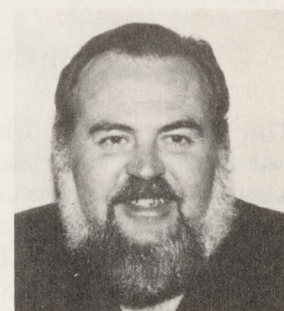
THE REV. DONALD E. JOHNSON (56) is a member of MCC Tampa, FL, and is the former President of the National Council of Community Churches. He holds an A.B. degree from Butler University (Indianapolis, IN) and a B.D. from Garrett Seminary (Evanston, IL). The Rev. Johnson has been a minister for approximately thirty years, having served the Methodist Church and other denominations in many capacities, including teaching and counselling. He entered the ministry "because this was the only way I could live any kind of 'God-centered' existence, feeling I was doing God's will with my life. My interest in people and in therapy could best be experienced in the church." The Rev. Johnson believes his "ability to relate with aggressive warmth and acceptance of people — an ability to be a caring, involved person" is of utmost importance to his ministry, and feels the main purpose of the UFMCC is "the acceptance of salvation for all people, regardless of their sexuality and/or chosen lifestyle . . . the education of a culture and an inter-relation with main line denominations for their growth and edification."



THE REV. GEORGE L. COVINGTON (37) is the Worship Coordinator for MCC of the Palms (Ft. Myers, FL), and the church has experienced considerable growth under his leadership. A former Benedictine monk, the Rev. Covington was asked to leave the order when his gayness was exposed. Previously an Exhorter with MCC St. Louis, MO, the Rev. Covington has attended Our Lady of the Angels Seminary (Quincy, IL), Notre Dame College (St. Louis, MO), Washington University (St. Louis, MO), and St. Pius X Monastery. Of utmost importance to his ministry, the Rev. Covington feels, is his "concern for people, the salvation of their souls, and most of all, God's love for me and our special ministry." A former teacher, the Rev. Covington was the Director of Christian Education for Incarnate Word School (Chesterfield, MO), prior to assuming pastoral duties at MCC of the Palms. He feels that the primary goal of the UFMCC "is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world, educating all who would hear the Word of God."



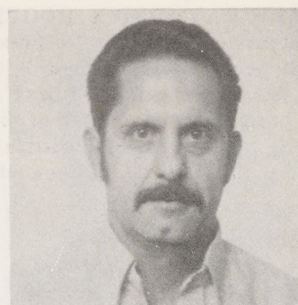
THE REV. BERN DAVID (43) comes to the UFMCC from the Eastern Rite Catholic Church. An accredited medical records technician, he has an A.A. degree from East Los Angeles College and is a candidate for graduation from Samaritan Theological Institute. During his exhortership at MCC Los Angeles, the Rev. David participated in that congregation's ministry to the aged and dying, as well as in their ministry to the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking American Hispanics. He has also been active in Latinos Unidos, an organization sponsored by the Gay Community Services Center in L.A. He states that he entered the professional ministry because "I know many gays and lesbians who are unchurched or have been barred from their churches who would, if they knew we are around, be part of a Christian community." The Rev. David, who is now serving West Bay MCC in Santa Monica, CA, feels that the main goal of the UFMCC is to make "God's love known to all people."



THE REV. FLORINE L. "FLO" FLEISCHMAN (48) has a long history of service in MCC congregations, beginning with a term on the Board of Directors of West Bay MCC in Santa Monica, CA. She transferred to MCC-LA where she worked with the Christian Women's Association, the Finance Committee, and the Crisis Intervention program. The Rev. Fleischman is a graduate of Samaritan Theological Institute. She comes to the professional ministry from the real estate business so that she can "bring the gospel message to those who have been turned away by their churches, and tell them that God loves every one of us." Besides the basic preaching of the gospel, the Rev. Fleischman sees the main purpose of the UFMCC as "to show the world that we can be united in Christ's universal love no matter what our sexual orientation is."



THE REV. VIRGIL HENDERSHOT, JR. (39) is a member of MCC Los Angeles, CA where he has served as Senior Exhorter and as a member of the Finance, By-Laws, and Visitation Committees. The Rev. Hendershot holds a B.S. in Social Studies from the University of Corpus Christi (Texas). His "concern for reaching out to others" prompted his entry into the ministry, and he believes "that this is where God would have me serve." A former Southern Baptist, the Rev. Hendershot feels the purpose of the UFMCC is "to spread the Gospel to the gay community first and then to all people."



THE REV. NORMA "RICKIE" RICHARDS (53) is Co-Pastor of King of Peace MCC in St. Petersburg, FL, with the Rev. Susan Kliebenstein. She was an Exhorter for the MCC's in L.A. and Phoenix; served as a Deacon for MCC Miami, FL; and served as Co-Worship Coordinator for MCC Pensacola, FL. The Rev. Richards has attended Miami-Dade Junior College and believes her "maturity/life experience" is an asset to her ministry. A former Roman Catholic, the Rev. Richards believes the goal of the UFMCC is to be "a witness to God's enduring love for all people."

PALM SPRINGS PASTOR STRIKES IT RICH ON NBC GAME SHOW

The Rev. Debbie Gendron, Pastor of MCC Palm Springs, California, has a lot of traveling in her future, thanks to the all-expense-paid vacations she won on the NBC-TV game show, *Wheel of Fortune*. The Rev. Gendron won almost \$16,000 in gift certificates and merchandise, including trips to London, Ireland, and Hawaii. During her three-day appearance on the program, the Rev. Gendron also won a pool table, color television, four sets of luggage, a new Buick Skylark, and a Moped. Her appearance on the show was televised on October 10, 11, and 12.

And how does she feel about her good fortune? "It was really a lot of fun, but I didn't know how much stuff I'd won until they started delivering it to my house!" †

GREAT LAKES HAPPENINGS

The Great Lakes District is excited to report new leaders and additions to the Fellowship family. At our spring District Conference, in addition to recommending Mission Status for our groups in Milwaukee, WI and Louisville, KY, we granted Study Group status to Columbus, OH. We Elected for two-year terms, the Rev. Angie Umbertino, Co-Pastor of MCC Akron, OH, as our District Coordinator. The Rev. Ted L. Richmond, who is leading our newest work in Ann Arbor, was chosen as Assistant District Coordinator. Both are 1977 graduates of Samaritan Theological Institute. The Rev. Umbertino had been serving as acting DC since January, due to the resignation of the Rev. Ken Martin.

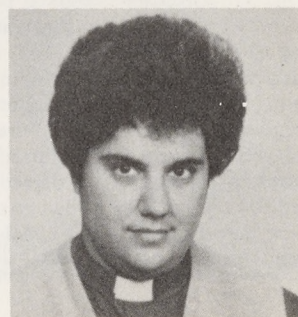
At the Fall District Conference, which was held at Adrain College in Michigan, we welcomed to the District: the Rev. Ken Taylor, Interim Pastor of MCC Milwaukee; the Rev. Sandy Taylor and the Rev. Anne Keast, Interim Co-Pastors of MCC Louisville; the Rev. Arthur Skipper, Worship Coordinator of Columbus; and the new Pastor of MCC Chicago, the Rev. F. Jay Deacon.

We have five Chartered Churches, three Missions, one Study Group, and one feasibility study in progress in our six state area. All, with the exception of Ft. Wayne, IN, are led by licensed or ordained ministers. Ft. Wayne is searching for a minister, and will hopefully soon have one. God has blessed this District richly, and we are all thankful. †

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

The Rev. Randall Hill, Pastor of MCC Sarasota, has been selected as one of the "Outstanding Young Men In America" for 1978 by the Jaycees of America. He received this award for his contributions as founding Pastor of MCC Knoxville, TN, and for his overall involvement in the area of gay rights.

MCC Sarasota has dropped the phrase "of the Holy Apostles" from its name. If you have MCC Sarasota on your mailing list, they request that you adjust your records to reflect this change. †



Rev. Umbertino



Rev. Richmond

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MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

MCC Melbourne has witnessed steady growth in church attendance, and has developed new programs to provide greater opportunities for individual learning and participation. The congregation has been exploring topics such as "What Is Worship?", and "The Sociology of Being Gay", as well as examining the various aspects of loneliness and fear.

The Rev. Karen Linstrom and the Rev. Jan Weymouth have been conducting a continuing education class at the Gresswell Alcohol and Drug Dependency Centre, and their involvement has resulted in the establishment of MCC Melbourne as a referral source for gay clients. †

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8) "PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE:
MAKING IT WORK FOR YOU"
led by the Rev. Karen Wheeler, M.A.

An introduction to parliamentary law, with an emphasis on leading and actively participating in business meetings. A familiarity with the terms and mechanics of parliamentary procedure is extremely beneficial for clergy, lay delegates, and Board of Directors members, and this seminar is recommended for all.

9) "OPERATION RESURRECTION:
A MODEL FOR LOCAL CHURCH RENEWAL"
led by the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson

Rev. Wilson's "Operation Resurrection" seminar is well-known throughout the Fellowship as a positive, workable model for assisting local congregations to discover their ministry and then to

implement that ministry in practical ways. Many local MCC's have already used "Operation Resurrection" to renew their vision and to restructure their ministry accordingly.

Each Samaritan Seminar lasts approximately four hours and costs \$10.00 per participant. Persons who are officially enrolled students of STI (whether resident or extension) may receive one credit for each of these seminars they complete with a follow-up paper.

If your District, local church, or group of churches wishes to sign up for one of these Samaritan Seminars, contact the Rev. Pulling, Dean of STI, 5300 Santa Monica, Blvd., Suite 104, LA, CA, 90029.

Transportation costs and housing for the faculty member(s) leading the seminar must be provided by the inviting body. An additional honorarium is not necessary. †

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

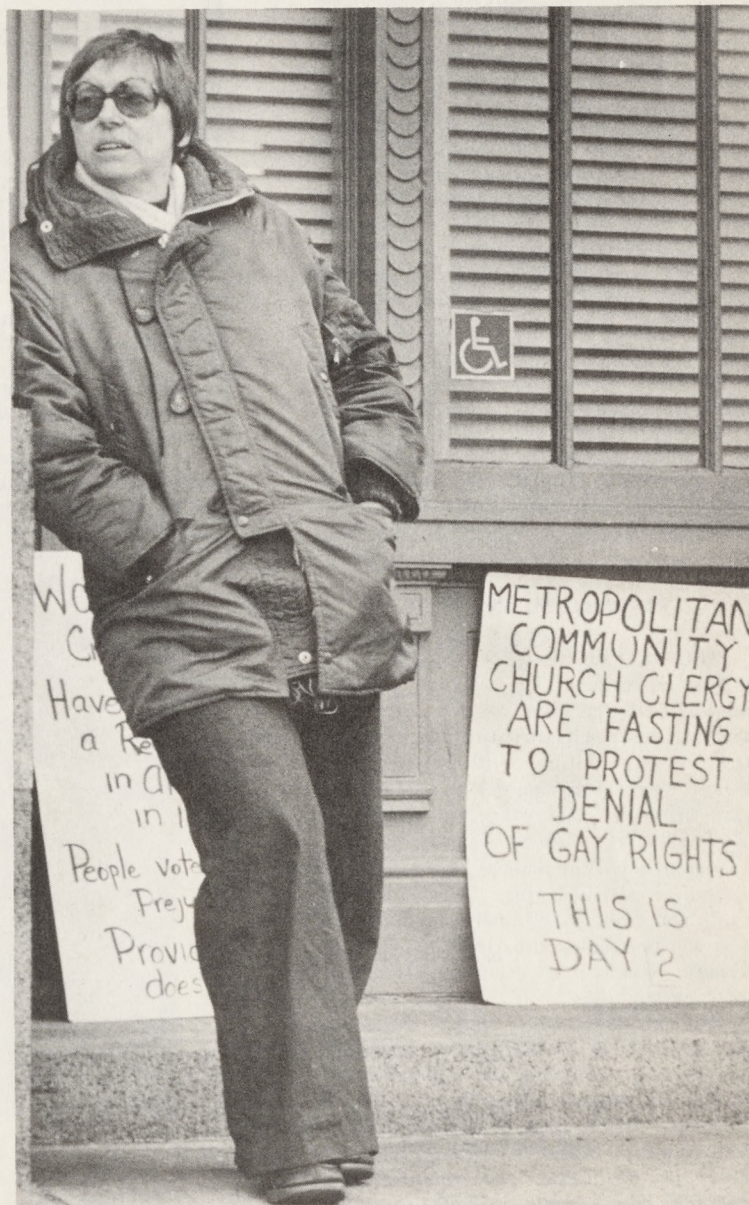
The Rev. Marge Ragona, Pastor of MCC Providence, conducted a seven-day fast on the steps of the federal court house in Providence, protesting the recent repeal of gay rights legislation in major U.S. cities. The Rev. Ragona received a great deal of media attention during the fast. One reporter from the *Providence Journal -- Bulletin* asked her if she were afraid to spend nights in downtown Providence while crusading for an unpopular cause. Her reply? "I have great faith in Providence's apathy and its lack of involvement in this sort of issue."

The Rev. Ragona was one of many MCC clergy who fasted to call attention to growing discriminatory attitudes in this country regarding gay persons.

MCC Providence's host church, the Mathewson Street United Methodist Church, has been very supportive of the Rev. Ragona and the MCC congregation. The following note from Pastor Wilbur C. Ziegler appeared in the Methodist Church's newsletter, *The Messenger*: "Thank you to all the members of our church family who have encouraged and supported the vigil on the steps of the Federal Building of the Rev. Marge Ragona of the Metropolitan Community Church. The gesture of stopping by or waving from your cars indicates not necessarily agreement on the issue of homosexuality, but support for a ministry of courage, justice, caring, and reconciliation."

In another supportive effort, the Executive Minister of the Rhode Island State Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr. Paul Gillespie, sent invitations to pastors to attend a small meeting with the Rev. Ragona and Mr. Chuck Noice to discuss the serious civil rights problems faced by Rhode Island gays. A direct result of these letters was that the Rev. Ragona and Mr. Noice met with the Providence Police Commissioner to discuss mutual difficulties. They have been given permission to speak at the Police Academy (to both rookies and promotees to Sergeant and Lieutenant). There has also been a new force of four officers assigned to the area where the gay bars are. They are "sensitive" officers who are "encouraged to go into the bars, get to know the gay people, and act to protect the gays IN the bars, on the streets, and from attacking, marauding gangs that have been hassling the gays."

Other media coverage has highlighted some of the special programs of the church. An appeal for persons interested or skilled in a ministry to the deaf, which appeared in the *Rhode Island Churchman*, has indicated that MCC Providence is one of



only three churches in the Providence religious community carrying out a ministry to the deaf.

The Rev. Troy Perry recently visited the congregation, and the Rev. Ragona advises that during his visit the church had its largest gathering since she arrived in Providence. A total of 71 persons assembled to hear the Rev. Perry speak. †

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Those of us in the Fellowship offices were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of the Rev. Peter Alexander-Smith on September 15, 1978. A former Anglican priest, the Rev. Alexander-Smith was licensed as a minister in the UFMCC in January, 1976, and served as Pastor of MCC Auckland from early 1977 until his death.*

I had recently written to Pastor Alexander-Smith requesting information about MCC Auckland for In Unity. Upon reading his reply, I decided that any paraphrasing and editing I might do would only detract from his observations. I would like to share segments of his letter with you in the hope that we will all gain some insight into our community of believers in Auckland, New Zealand.

"Expect the unexpected would sum up my personal feelings about this group. In some ways we are marking time — in other ways we are going forward. Our numbers at Worship Service fluctuate from 25 to 50 on any given Sunday. If we have a 'good attendance' one Sunday, it will be right down the next — a general attitude seems to be that 'I get such a buzz when I do come that it lasts quite a while so I don't have to come too often.' We get a lot of visitors, including ministers of religion who openly say that they are there just to see what we are up to; we get some 'first-timers' who never come again; but we do have a committed core, who will do what is asked of them, and in these small numbers we are able to exercise a personal ministry and are able to get to know each other in a way that we could not if we grew in numbers too fast.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MCC St. Paul has grown rapidly since its first worship service, held in the basement of a women's bar, on Dec. 13, 1977. Within three weeks of its founding by the Rev. Brenda Hunt, enthusiastic supporters began donating office space, altar ware, hymnals, and other necessities to ensure that MCC is in St. Paul to stay.

Presently comprised of 27 dedicated and active members (plus 11 persons currently attending membership classes), the church has become the UFMCC's newest Mission, having been granted that status on August 22, 1978.

MCC St. Paul recently moved from the women's bar into an old Quaker mansion, located approximately two blocks from St. Paul's Cathedral. They hope to secure additional office space in the near future to open a type of community center in an effort to encourage gay organizations, presently based in Minneapolis, to establish branches in St. Paul. MCC St. Paul is currently the only gay organization in the city, besides the gay bars. Members of the church were instrumental in organizing the 1978 Gay Pride Parade in St. Paul. Prior to this year, the parade had been held in Minneapolis.

IN MEMORIAM

THE REVEREND
PETER D. ALEXANDER-SMITH

DIED: SEPTEMBER 15, 1978

We ARE a Study Group, and when a few more have had time to know just what MCC really is, and learn more about their walk with God and their commitment to others, then and only then will we be strong enough to become a Mission. The mission to New Zealand is urgent, but God is preparing the way.

"We have a regular "Prayer, Care, and Share" meeting on Wednesdays, at my home, at which we sing, and have both Bible Study and Membership Classes going simultaneously in separate rooms, and finish with a prayer circle. These are usually well attended, and help to draw us even closer together.

"We have people in eight towns now, outside of Auckland who would like to see an MCC group in their area, if only they had leadership. Because we have no

one of Worship Coordinator status to appoint, nothing very exciting is happening. The potential is there for sure. What I'm trying to get across is that New Zealand is wide open for MCC ministry, if only we had the pastors, and MCC Auckland is doing what it can to extend this ministry.

"Our people are of all types and ages. Our oldest regular is well in his seventies and our youngest is a 14 year-old boy who doesn't come very often because his parents don't like him going to church. We have transsexuals, both pre and post op. Our Church Clerk is a post-op trans-person and she is now legally married and her husband comes along. Parents of gays put in the occasional appearance. Actually, when I think of it, our youngest is only nine years old, for his grandfather brings him along — though I don't think the boy's parents know. We're the usual cross-section group and we all get on well together. We've got Charismatics, who sometimes speak in tongues, and non-Charismatics who never speak in tongues. We've got the painfully shy, we've got the 'pushy' — in fact, we've got God's people, PRAISE THE LORD!

"You say in your letter that you hope we don't feel too isolated. Well, we don't get all the news we'd like to have, particularly a 'follow-up' of what we do hear. We've heard of fasts by Rev. Perry and Rev. Carlton, but not enough of the outcome of these — and we hear of them too late to join in. But still we pray for you, and know that we are with you in spirit, and we do feel the 'presence' of the whole Fellowship with us, especially in our worship. We feel the fact that the Fellowship is praying for us, so we praise God, who is showing a mighty hand around here." †



The Congregation of MCC Saint Paul -- Easter Sunrise Service on River Bluffs overlooking Saint Paul

Despite its growing pains, MCC St. Paul is on the move, solidly based on the enthusiasm and commitment of its members. In a joyful and cooperative spirit, they are looking forward to working with other gay organizations in the Twin Cities, for the betterment of both communities.

Their plans for the future include a fund raiser, scheduled for late fall, and a congregational retreat, to be held in October.

How does the Rev. Hunt feel about her congregation? "What can I say? They are the greatest people in the world." †

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ways of improving our communications we will certainly need to practice being loving and gracious with each other, too.) We ask each of you to help — if you have information or programs, (how DO you get your social committee to work?) send a copy to the general offices along with permission to reprint. These packets will be made available through the Church Services Department.

BOARD OF ELDERS' MINUTES TO BE DISTRIBUTED

The Elders have also decided to disseminate, to each church group, the minutes from each Elders meeting. They have asked for your constructive ideas and comments about the work of our Fellowship. Correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Board of Elders, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd, Suite 304, LA, CA 90029. Copies of pertinent correspondence will be forwarded to each member of the Board of Elders.

COMMISSION AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURE EXAMINED

Some committees, which have been primarily inactive due to lack of resources, have been suspended until human and/or financial resources can be secured, i.e., the Commission on Religious Institutes, the Board of Campus Ministry, the Board of Counselors to the Board of Elders.

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION LEADS THE WAY

The Commission on Christian Social Action has requested reorganization to help them function more effectively. The following is a portion of a memo received by the Board of Elders from R. Adam DeBaugh and the Rev.'s Claudia Vierra, Frank Murr and Sky Anderson:

At the last two General Conferences we have had two things come up in the discussions (and frequent controversies) about Christian Social Action. First are questions about what we are doing, sometimes accompanied by criticism that we are not doing enough; and secondly, brave and generous offers of help and commitments to work are made by many people. As chairpeople we have been concerned about the questions and we have tried to rely on the commitments. There lies our disappointment.

In looking at the past year, since General Conference 1977 in Denver, we have realized that much of our time has been spent in trying to find people to fill up these task forces. Each time we talk to each other it seems as though our discussion starts and ends with whether or not the North-by-North-West District has elected a member to the Men's

Task Force, or whether or not MCC of Beulahland has appointed a chair of its committee for Christian Social Action, or what ever happened to so-and-so who had said she was going to be working on a task force or committee.

Not very much has been done by the Commission on Christian Social Action over the past year. In fact the only things done by the Commission over the past year are questionnaires sent out by the Women's and Men's Task Forces (which have had very small response) and the materials published by the Washington Field Office. Many things are going on in the local level, both in local congregations and by Districts, but often we don't even hear about them.

In general we see three major problems, all of them inter-related. First, a great deal of our energies are going into trying to create, staff, and maintain a bureaucracy (task forces and committees) with very little success and productivity. Secondly, we are getting little or no response from our attempts to involve people at the local and district level. Thirdly, church leaders at the local and district levels don't seem to be taking our efforts seriously: we get no support and assistance between General Conferences and at General Conference we get complaints.

What we do recommend is a restructuring, a streamlining, and a centralization. We recommend the Commission on Christian Social Action eliminate its separate component parts, the Task Force on Women, the Task Force on Men, the Task Force on Human Rights, and the Committee on Racism. We recommend that the Commission henceforth be a single body which has as its primary thrust issues concerning women, men, racism and human rights.

We do not want this interpreted as moving away from our commitment to these four areas of concern, but rather an administrative reorganization that will consolidate our work in these four areas and enable us to work more effectively together. Commission chair Adam DeBaugh would like to remain chair of the Commission, and he would like Reverends Vierra, Murr and Anderson to remain as members of the Commission as well. In fact, each of us would continue to have oversight over our past areas of specialty.

The reason for this change is really quite simple. In the past year we have not been able to accomplish much because of the pressures to create, sustain and maintain a bureaucracy so the work of Christian Social Action can be as broad as possible. But that means finding people who have the interest, time and energy to expend. We are a very young Fellowship and all of our good people are already over-extended, from the Elders on down. We think we put the cart before the horse and that once we start really producing materials for local congregations to use, people will want to work with us. We now have at least four people who are willing to expend our energy and time on Christian Social Action (and we can find more), so why don't we just go ahead and do it!

We think this is important and wise. So we formally recommend to the Board of Elders that the Task Force on Women, the Task Force on Men, the Task Force on Human Rights, and the Committee on Racism be abolished as separate entities within the Commission on Christian Social Action, with the stipulation that the Commission will continue to pursue the goals and concerns of these task forces and committee.

The question will arise, how can the Elders (or the Commission itself) disband task forces created by General Conference? We hope the Elders can help us with a response, but it seems clear to us that the will of the General Conference is that UFMCC work on certain issues. The structures were created to facilitate that work. The work is more important than a particular structure. If the structures have failed, as we believe they have, then it is time to consolidate so that the work can be done.

Our eventual goal is to expand the Commission beyond just us four, and we are conscious of the need to increase the number of women and laypeople, and involve racial minorities as well. But right now we have very few names of people we know will be able to work, and that is what this restructuring is all about! What we propose, unless the Elders have another suggestion, is that we ask In Unity to print this memo and the Elders' decision (if you all go along with our idea). Through this we ask people throughout the Fellowship to contact Adam DeBaugh if they are interested in serving with us. We will be contacting people who have worked with us as well, and by the next Elders meeting we will have a list of nominations for you, people who have expressed an interest and a firm commitment to work."

CONGRATULATIONS TO MCC'S AUSTIN AND CALGARY

Congratulations to the congregation of MCC Austin, TX, which was designated a Chartered Church by the Board of Elders during their September meeting. The Rev. Dr. Jefferson Bishop, pastor of MCC Austin, was licensed in the professional ministry of the UFMCC this year.

The Elders also approved Mission status for MCC Calgary, Canada. Pastoring the Fellowship's newest Mission is the Rev. Lloyd Greenway, who has been a minister in the UFMCC since 1977.

THANKS! WE NEEDED THAT

Many thanks to all of you who responded to the Church Services and IN UNITY questionnaires. Please do not think that we have filed them away for posterity! We appreciate the valid and candid comments that were expressed, and want you to know that we are using your suggestions. We hope to be able to publish a short summary of the responses soon. †

CELEBRATE



Metropolitan Community Church

1050 South Hill Street, Los Angeles, California 90015 • (213) 748-0121

10th Anniversary



Wednesday, October 4th at 7:30 p.m.

Evening Service

Thursday, October 5th at 7:30 p.m.

Music Festival

Friday, October 6th at 7:30 p.m.

Potluck Dinner

Saturday, October 7th

GALA DINNER AND SHOW

Cocktails at 6:30 p.m. & Dinner at 8:00 p.m.

Entertainment by the talented

"Ms. Kathy" at 10:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 8th at 11:00 a.m.

ANNIVERSARY SERVICE

Sunday Evening Candlelight Service

22nd and Union Streets "Landmark" at 7:30 p.m.